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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE CURATE IN CHARGE," ETC.

"No man can redeem his brother."—Ps. XLIX. 7.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1878.

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YOUNG MUSEGRAVE

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF "THE CURATE IN CHARGE," ETC.

"No man can reflect his brother,"—P. 101.

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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CONTENTS

O F V O L U M E I I.

	Page
CHAPTER I. An Early Meeting	7
— II. The Hens and the Duckling	19
— III. Cousin Mary's Opinion	33
— IV. The Squire at Home	46
— V. A New Visitor	63
— VI. In Suspense	76
— VII. An Apparition	92
— VIII. The Loves of the Angels	109
— IX. Nello's Journey	121
— X. A Child forlorn	139
— XI. A Crisis at Penninghame	154
— XII. Nello's Rescue	175
— XIII. The Babes in the Wood	188
— XIV. The New-comer	199
— XV. Another Helper	213
— XVI. The Beginning of the End	226
— XVII. A Traitor	238
— XVIII. The Mother	248
— XIX. The Tragedy ends	264
— XX. Conclusion	271

CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

Page	CHAPTER I. An Early Meeting	1
19	II. The House and the Park	19
31	III. Captain Merv's Opinion	31
40	IV. The Spots at Home	40
61	V. A New Visitor	61
70	VI. In Spite	70
94	VII. An Argument	94
103	VIII. The Loss of the Light	103
121	IX. Ned's Journey	121
130	X. A Challenge	130
154	XI. A Chase at Birmingham	154
173	XII. Nell's Escape	173
183	XIII. The Letter to the Widow	183
193	XIV. The New-comer	193
213	XV. Another Hope	213
225	XVI. The Legend of the Bell	225
235	XVII. A Tower	235
245	XVIII. The Minister	245
264	XIX. The Tragic End	264
271	XX. Conclusion	271

YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

CHAPTER I.

An Early Meeting.

GEOFF left the cottage when the sun had just risen. He was half-giddy, half-stunned by the strange new light, unexpected up to the last moment, which had been thrown upon the whole question which he had undertaken to solve. He was giddy too with fatigue, the night's watch, the long walk, the want of sleep. Besides all these confusing influences there is something in the atmosphere of the very early morning, the active stillness, the absence of human life, the pre-occupation of Nature with a hundred small (as it were) domestic cares, such as she never exhibits to the eye of man, that moves the mind of an unaccustomed observer to a kind of rapture, bewildering in its solemn influence. To come out from the lonely little house folded among the hills, with all its miseries past and present, its sad story, its secret, the atmosphere of human suffering in it, to all the still glory of the summer morning, was of itself a bewilderment. The same world, and only a step between them: but one all pain and darkness, mortal anguish, and confusion—the other all so clear, so sweet, so still, solemn with the serious beginning of the new day, and in-

stinct with that great, still pressure of something more than what is seen, some soul of earth and sky which goes deeper than all belief, and which no sceptic of the higher kind, but only the gross and earthly, can disbelieve in. Young Geoff disbelieving nothing, his heart full of the faith and conviction of youth, came out into this wide purity and calm with an expansion of all his being. It was all he could do not to burst into sudden tears when he felt the sudden relief—the dew crept to his eyelids though it did not fall, his bosom contracted and expanded as with a sob. To this world of mountain and cloud—of rising sunshine and soft breathing air, and serene delicious silence, pervaded by the soft indistinguishable hum of unseen water and rustling grasses, and minute living creatures unseen too beneath the mountain herbage—what is the noblest palace built with hands but a visible limitation and contraction of the world, an appropriation of a petty corner out of which human conceit makes its centre of the earth? Bampfylde, who had come out with him, and to whom the story Geoff had just heard was not new, felt the relief more simply. He drew a long breath of refreshment and ease, expanding his breast and stretching out his arms; and then this rough vagrant fellow, unconscious of literature, did what Virgil in the *Purgatorio* did in such a morning for his poet companion; he spread both his hands upon the fragrant grass, all heavy with the early dew, and bathed his face and weary eyes.

“That’s life,” said the man of woods and hills; the freshness of nature was all the help he had, all the support as well as all the poetry his maimed existence could possess.

Bampfylde went with his young companion round the shoulder of the hill to show him the way. It was a nearer and shorter road to the level country than that by which they had come, for Geoff was anxious to get home early. Bampfylde pointed out to him the line of road which twisted about and about like a ribbon, crossing now one slope, now another, till it disappeared upon the shadowed side of the green hill which presided over Penninghame, and beyond which the lake gleamed blue, not yet reached by the sunshine.

"It's like the story," he said; "it's like a parable; ye come by Stanton, my young lord, and ye go by Penninghame. It's your nearest way; and there, if you ask at John Armstrong's in the village, ye'll get a trap to take you home."

Geoff was not sufficiently free in mind to be able to give any attention to the parable. Those fantastic symbolisms of accident or circumstance which so often would seem to be arranged like shadows of more important matters by some elfish secondary providence, need a spirit at rest to enter into them. He was glad to be alone, to realize all that he had heard, to compose the wonderful tangle of new information and new thoughts into something coherent, without troubling himself about the fact that he was now bending his steps direct, the representative of Walter Stanton who had been killed, towards the house from which John Musgrave had been wrongfully driven for having killed him. He did not even yet know all the particulars of the story, and as he endeavoured to disentangle them in his mind Geoff felt in his bewilderment that absolute want of control over his own intelligence and

thoughts which is the common result of fatigue and overstrain. Instead of thinking out the imbroglio and deciding what was to be done, his mind, like a tired child, kept playing with the rising light which touched every moment a new peak and caught every moment a new reflection in some bit of mountain stream or waterfall, or even in a ditch or moorland cutting, so impartial is Heaven; or his ear was caught by that hum of mystic indistinguishable multitude—"the silence of the hills," so called—the soft rapture of sound in which not one tone is distinct or anything audible; or his eye by the gradual unrolling of the landscape as he went on, one fold opening beyond another, the distant hills on one hand, the long stretch of Penninghame water with all its miniature bays and curves. Then for a little while he lost the lake by a doubling of the path, which seemed to reinclose him among the hollows of the hills, and which pleased his languid faculties with the complete change of its shade and greenness; until turning the next corner, he found the sun triumphant over all the landscape, and Penninghame water lying like a sheet of silver or palest gold, dazzling and flashing between its slopes. This wonderful glory so suddenly bursting upon him completed the discomfiture of young Geoff's attempts at thought. He gave it up then, and went on with weary limbs and a mind full of languid soft delight in the air about him and the scene before his eyes, attempting no more deductions from what he had heard or arrangements as to what he should do. Emotion and exertion together had worn him out.

About the time he resigned himself (with the drowsy surprise we feel in dreams) to this incapable

state, his eye was caught by a speck upon the road beneath advancing towards him, so small in the distance that Geoff's languid imagination, capable of no more active exercise, began to wonder who the little pilgrim could be, so little and so lonely, and so early astir. Perhaps it was the distance that made the advancing passenger look so small. Little Liliass at the Castle would have satisfied her mind by the easy conclusion that it was some little fairy old woman, the traveller most naturally to be met with at such an hour and place. But Geoff, more artificial, did not think of that. He kept watching the little wayfarer, as the figure appeared and disappeared on the winding road. By and by he made out that it was either a very small woman or a little girl, coming on steadily to meet him, with now and then an occasional pause for breath, for the ascent was steep. Geoff's mind got quite entangled with this little figure. Who could it be? who could she be? A little cottager bound on some early expedition, seeking some of the mountain fruits, blackberries, cranberries, wild strawberries, perhaps: but then she never turned aside to the rougher ground, but kept on the path;—or she might be going to some farmhouse to get milk for the family breakfast: but then there were no farmhouses in that direction. Altogether Geoff felt himself quite sufficiently occupied as he came gradually downwards watching this child, his limbs feeling heavy, and his head somewhat light. At last, after losing sight of the little figure which had given him for some time a sort of distant companionship, another turn brought him full in sight of her, and so near that he recognised her with the most curious and startling interest. He could

not restrain an exclamation of surprise. It was the little girl whom he had met at the door of Penninghame Castle, John Musgrave's child, the most appropriate, yet the most extraordinary, of all encounters he could have made. He stood still in his surprise, awaiting her; and as for little Lillas, she made a sudden spring towards him, holding out her hand with a cry of joy, her little pale face crimsoned over with relief and pleasure. Her heart and limbs were beginning to fail her; she had begun to grow frightened and discouraged by the loneliness; and to see a face that had been seen before, that had looked friendly, that recognised her—what a relief it was to the little wayfaring soul! She sprang forward to him, and then in the comfort of it fairly broke down, and sobbed and cried, trying to smile all the time, and to tell him that she was glad, and that he must not mind.

Geoff, however, minded very much. He was full of concern and sympathy. He took her hand, and putting his arm round her (for she was still a child), led her to the soft, mossy bank on the edge of the path, and placed her there to rest. He was not at all sorry to place himself beside her, notwithstanding his haste. He, too, was so young and so tired! though for the moment he forgot both his fatigue and his youth, and felt most fatherly, soothing the little girl, and entreating her to take comfort, and not to cry.

"Oh," said little Lillas, when she recovered the power of speech, "I am not crying for trouble, *now*; I am crying for pleasure. It was so lonely. I thought everybody must be dead, and there was no one but only me in all the world."

"That was exactly what I felt too," said Geoff;

"but what are you doing here, so far away, and all alone? Have you lost yourself? Has anything happened? When you have rested a little, you must come back with me, and I will take you home."

The tears were still upon the child's cheeks, and two great lucid pools in her eyes, which made their depths of light more unfathomable than ever. And after the sudden flush of excitement and pleasure, Liliás had paled again; her little countenance was strangely white; her dark hair hung, loosely curling, about her cheeks; her eyes were full of pathetic meaning. Geoff, who had thrown himself down beside her, with one arm half round her, and holding her small hand in his, felt his young breast swell with the tenderest sympathy. What was the child's trouble that was so great? Poor little darling! How sweet it was to be able to fill up her world, and prove to her that there was not "only me." One other made all the difference; and Geoff felt this as much as she did. Her face had gleamed so often across his imagination since he saw it: the most innocent visitant that could come and look a young man in the face in the midst of his dreams—only a child! He felt disposed to kiss the little hand in half fondness, half reverence; but did not, being restrained by something more reverent and tender still.

"I would like to go with you," said Liliás, "but not home. I am not going home. I am going up there—up, I don't know how far—where the old woman lives. I am trying to find something out, something about papa. Oh, I wonder if you know! Are you a friend of my papa? You look as if you had a friend's face—but I don't know your name."

"My name—is Geoffrey Stanton—but most people call me Geoff. I should like you to call me Geoff—and I am a friend, little Lily. You are Lily *too*, are you not? I am a sworn friend to your papa."

"Lilias," said the child, with a sigh; "but I don't think I am little any more. I was little when I came, but old; oh! much older than any one thought. They thought I was only ten because I was so little; but I was twelve! and that will soon be a year ago. I have always taken care of Nello as long as I can remember, and that makes one old, you know. And now here is this about papa, which I never knew, which I never heard of, which is not true, I know. I know it is not true. Papa kill any one! *papa?* Do you know what that means? It is as if—the sky should kill some one, or the beautiful kind light, or a little child. All that, all that, sooner than papa! Me, I have often felt as if I could kill somebody; but *he*——" the tears were streaming in a torrent down the child's cheeks, and got into her voice; but she went on, "he! people don't know what they are saying. I do not know any words to tell you how different he is—that it is impossible, *impossible! impossible!*" she cried, her voice rising in intensity of emphasis. As for Geoff, he held her hand ever closer, and kept gazing at her with the tears coming to his own eyes.

"He did not do it," he said. "Listen to me, Lilias, and if you write to him, you can tell him. Tell him Geoffrey Stanton knows everything, and will never rest till he is cleared. Do you know what I mean? You must tell him——"

"But I never write—we do not know where he is; but tell me over again for me, *me*. He did not do it!

Do you think I do not know that? But Mr. Geoff (if that is your name), come with me up to the old woman, and take her to the tribunal, and make her tell what she knows. That is the right way, Martuccia says so, and I have read it in books. She must go to the judge, and she must say it all, and have it written down in a book. It is like that—I am not so ignorant. Come with me to the old woman, Mr. Geoff.”

“What old woman?” he asked. “And tell me how you heard of all this, Liliass? You did not know it when I saw you before.”

“Last night—only last night; there is a man, an unkind, disagreeable man, who is at the Castle now. Mary said he was my uncle Randolph. They were in the hall, and I heard them talking. That man said it all; but Mary did not say No as I do, she only cried. And then I rushed and asked Miss Brown what it meant. Miss Brown is Mary’s maid, and she knows everything. She told me about a gentleman, and then of some one who was mamma, and of an old woman who could tell it all, up, up on the mountain. I think perhaps, it is the same old woman I saw.”

“Did you see her? When did you see her, Lily?”

“I was little then,” said Liliass, with mournful, childish dignity. “I had not begun to know. I thought, perhaps, it was a fairy. Yes, you will laugh. I was only not much better than a child. And when children are in the woods, don’t you know, fairies often come? I was ignorant, that was what I thought. She was very kind. She kissed me, and asked if I would call her granny. Poor old woman! She was very very sorry for something. I think that must be the old woman. She knows everything, Miss Brown says.

Mr. Geoff," said Liliás, turning round upon him, putting her two clasped hands suddenly upon his shoulder, and fixing her eyes upon his face, "I am going to her, will you not come with me? It is dreadful, dreadful, to go away far alone—everything looks so big and so high, and one only, one is so small; and everything is singing altogether, and it is all so still; and then your heart beats and thumps, and you have no breath, and it is so far, far away. Mr. Geoff, oh! I would love you so much, I would thank you for ever, I would do anything for you, if you would only come with me! I am not really tired; only frightened. If I could have brought Nello, it would have been nothing. I should have had him to take care of,—but Nello is such a little fellow. He does not understand anything; he could not know about papa as I do, and as you seem to do. Mr. Geoff, when was it you saw papa? Oh! will you come up, up yonder, and go to the old woman with me?"

"Dear little Lily," said Geoff, holding her in his arms, "you are not able to walk so far; it is too much for you; you must come with me, home."

"I am able to go to the end of the world," cried Liliás, proudly. "I am not tired. Oh, if you had never come I should have gone on, straight on! I was thinking, perhaps, you would go with me, that made me so stupid. No, never mind, since you do not choose to come. Good-bye, Mr. Geoff. No, I am not angry. Perhaps you are tired yourself:—and then," said Liliás, her voice quivering, "you are not papa's child, and it is not your business. Oh! I am quite able to go on. I am not tired—not at all tired; it was only," she said, vehemently, the tears overpowering

her voice, "only because I caught sight of you so suddenly, and I thought 'he will come with me,' and it made my heart so easy—but never mind, never mind!"

By this time she was struggling to escape from him, to go on, drying her tears with a hasty hand. Her lips were quivering, scarcely able to form the words. The disappointment, after that little burst of hope, was almost more than Liliás could bear.

"Lily," he said, holding her fast, despite her struggles, "listen first. I have just been there. I have seen the old woman. There is nothing more for you to do, dear. Won't you listen to me,—won't you believe me? Dear little Lily, I have found out everything. I know everything. I cannot tell it you all, out here on the hill-side; but it was another who did it, and your father was so kind, so good, that he allowed it to be supposed it was he, to save the other man——"

"Ah!" cried Liliás, ceasing to struggle, "ah! yes, that is like him. I know my papa, there! yes, that is what he would do. Oh, Mr. Geoff, dear Mr. Geoff, tell me more, more!"

"As we go home," said Geoff. He was so tired that it was all he could do to raise himself again from the soft cushions of the mossy grass. He held Liliás still by the hand. And in this way the two wearied young creatures went down the rest of the long road together—she, eager, with her face raised to him; he stooping towards her. They leaned against each other in their weariness, walking on irregularly, now slow, now faster, hand in hand. And oh! how much shorter the way seemed to Liliás as she went back. She vowed never, never to tell any one; never to talk of it except to Mr. Geoff: while Geoff, on his part, promised that

everything should be set right, that everybody should know her father to be capable of nothing evil, but of everything good; that all should be well with him; that he should come and live at home for ever, and that all good people should be made happy, and all evil ones confounded. The one was scarcely more confident than the other that all this was possible and likely, as the boy and the girl came sweetly down the hill together, tired but happy, with traces of tears about their eyes, but infinite relief in their hearts. The morning, now warm with the full glory of the sun, was sweet beyond all thought—the sky, fathomless blue, above them—the lake a dazzling sheet of silver at their feet. Here and there sounds began to stir of awakening in the little farmhouses, and under the thatched cottage eaves; but still they had the earth all to themselves like a younger Adam and Eve—nothing but blue space and distance, sweet sunshine warming and rising breathing of odours and soft baptism of dew upon the new-created pair.

CHAPTER II.

The Hens and the Duckling.

It was still early, and Stanton, so easy-going and leisurely a house, was not yet astir when Geoff got home. Hours of sunshine and morning light are over even in August before seven o'clock, which was the earliest hour at which Lady Stanton's servants, who were all "so kind" to her, began to stir. They kept earlier hours at Penninghame, where Geoff managed to get a dog-cart, with an inquisitive driver, who recognised, and would fain have discovered what brought him from home at that hour. The young man, however, first took leave of his little companion, whom he deposited safely at the door of the old hall, which was already open, and where they parted with mutual vows of reliance and faith in each other. These vows, however, were not exchanged by the hall-gate, but in a shady corner of the Chase, where the two young creatures paused for a moment.

"You will trust me that I will do everything for him, as if he had been my own father?" said Geoff.

Lilias, over whom some doubts had begun to steal, faltered a little, and replied with some hesitation:

"I would rather it was me; I would rather find out everything, and bring him home," she said.

"But Lily, what could you do? while you see I know a great deal already," Geoff said. Now that he

was about to vanish out of her sight the bargain began to feel less satisfactory to the little woman, who was thus condemned, as so many grown women have been, to wait indefinitely for the action of another, in a matter so deeply interesting to herself. Liliias looked at him wistfully, with an anxious curve over her eyebrows, and a quiver in her mouth. The tension of suspense had begun for her, which is one of the hardest burdens of a woman. Oh, if she could but have gone herself, not waiting for any one, to the old woman on the hill! It was true the mountains were very lonely, and the relief of meeting Geoff had been intense; and though she had not gone half way, or nearly so much, her limbs were aching with the unusual distance; but yet to be tired, and lonely, and frightened is nothing, as Liliias felt, to this waiting, which might never come to an end. And already the ease and comfort and sudden relief with which she had leant upon Geoff's understanding and sympathy, had evaporated a little, leaving behind only the strange story about her father, the sudden discovery of trouble and sorrow which had startled her almost into womanhood out of childhood. She looked up into Geoff's face very wistfully—very anxiously; her eyes dilated, and gleaming with that curve over them which once indented in young brows so seldom altogether disappears again.

"Oh, Mr. Geoff!" she said, "but papa—is not your papa: and you will perhaps have other things to do: or—perhaps—you will forget. But me, I shall be always thinking, I shall never forget," said the little girl.

"And neither shall I forget, my little Lily!" he

cried. He too was nervous and tremulous with excitement and fatigue. He stooped towards her, holding her hands. "Give me a kiss, Lily, and I will never forget."

The day before she would not have thought much of that infantile salutation—and she put up her soft cheek readily enough, with the child's simple habit; but when the two faces touched, a flood of colour came over both, scorching Liliass, as it seemed, with a sense of shame which bewildered her, which she did not understand. She drew back hastily, with a sudden cry. Sympathy, or some other feeling still more subtle and incomprehensible, made Geoff's young countenance flame too. He looked at her with a tenderness that brought the tears to his eyes.

"You are only a child," he said, hastily, apologetically; "and I suppose I am not much more, as people say," he added, with a little broken laugh. Then, after a pause—"But Lily, we will never forget that we have met this morning; and what one of us does will be for both of us; and you will always think of me as I shall always think of you. Is it a bargain, Lily?"

"Always!" said the little girl, very solemnly; and she gave him her hand again which she had drawn away, and her other cheek; and this time the kiss got accomplished solemnly, as if it had been a religious ceremony on both sides—which indeed, perhaps, in one way or another it was.

When Geoff felt himself carried rapidly, after this, behind a fresh country horse, with the inquisitive ruddy countenance of Robert Gill from the "Penninghame Arms" by his side, along the margin of Penning-

hame Water towards his home, there was a thrill and tremor in him which he could not quite account for. By the time he had got half way home, however, he had begun to believe that the tremor meant nothing more than a nervous uncertainty as to how he should get into Stanton, and in what state of abject terror he might find his mother. Even to his own unsophisticated mind, the idea of being out all night had an alarming and disreputable sound; and probably Lady Stanton had been devoured by all manner of terrors. The perfectly calm aspect of the house, however, comforted Geoff; no one seemed stirring, except in the lower regions, where the humblest of its inhabitants—the servants' servants—were preparing for their superiors.

Geoff dismissed his dog-cart outside the gates, leaving upon the mind of Robert Gill a very strong certainty that the young lord was "a wild one, like them that went before him," and had been upon "no good gait." "Folks don't stay out all night, and creep into th' house through a side door as quiet as pussy, for good," said the rural sage, with perfect reasonableness.

As for Geoff, he stole up through the shrubberies to reconnoitre the house and see where he could most easily make an entrance, with a half-comic sense of vagabondism; a man who behaved so ought to be guilty. But he was greatly surprised to see the library window through which he had come out on the previous night wide open; and yet more surprised to hear, at the sound of his own cautious footstep on the gravel, a still more cautious movement within, and to descry the kindly countenance of Mr. Tritton, his

tutor, with a red nose and red eyes as from want of sleep, looking out with great precaution.

Mr. Tritton's anxious countenance lighted up at sight of him. He came to the window very softly, but with great eagerness, to admit Geoff, and threw himself upon his pupil. "Where have you been — where have you been? But thank God you have come back," he cried, in a voice which was broken by agitation.

Geoff could not but laugh, serious as he had been before. Good Mr. Tritton had a dressing-gown thrown over his evening toilet of the previous night; his white tie was all rumpled and disreputable. He had caught a cold, poor good man, with the open window, and sneezed even as he received his prodigal; his nose was red, and so were his eyes, which watered, half with cold, half with emotion.

"Oh, my dear Geoff," he cried, with a shiver: "what is the cause of this? I have spent a most unhappy night. What can be the cause of it! But thank God you have come back; and if I can keep it from the knowledge of her ladyship, I will." Then, though he was so tired and so serious, Geoff could not but laugh.

"Have you been sitting up for me? How good of you! and what a cold you have got!" he said struggling between mirth and gratitude. "Have you kept it from my mother? But I have been doing no harm, master. You need not look at me so anxiously. I have been walking almost all the night, and doing no harm."

"My dear Geoff? I have been very uneasy, of course. You never did anything of the kind before.

Walking all night! you must be dead tired; but that is secondary, quite secondary: if you can really assure me, on your honour——” said the anxious tutor, looking at him, with his little white whiskers framing his little red face, more like a good little old woman than ever, and with a look of the most anxious scrutiny in his watery eyes. Mr. Tritton was very virtuous and very particular in his own bachelorly person, and there had crept upon him besides something of the feminine fervour of anxiety about his charge, which was in the air of this feminine and motherly house.

“On my honour!” said Geoff, meeting his gaze with laughing eyes.

And a pang of relief filled Mr. Tritton’s mind. He was almost overcome by it, and could have cried but for his dignity—and, indeed, did cry for his cold. He said, faltering, “Thank Heaven, Geoff! I have been very anxious, my dear boy. Your mother does not know anything about it. I found the window open, and then I found your room vacant. I thought you might have—stepped out—perhaps gone to smoke a cigar. A cigar in the fresh air after dinner is perhaps the least objectionable form of the indulgence, as you have often heard me say. So I waited, especially as I had something to say to you. Then, as I found you did not come in, I became anxious—yes, very anxious as the night went on. You never did anything of the kind before; and when the morning came and woke me—for I suppose I must have dozed, though I was too miserable to sleep, in a draught——”

“Yes, I see, you have caught cold. Go to bed now, master, and so shall I,” said Geoff. “I am dead

tired. What a sneeze! and all on my account; and you have such bad colds."

"Yes," said Mr. Tritton, blowing his nose vehemently, "I have very bad colds. They last so long. I have sneezed so I really did fear the house would be roused, but servants fortunately sleep through anything. Geoff! I don't want to force confidence, but it really would be right that you could confide in me: otherwise how can I be sure that her ladyship—ought not," said the good man with a fresh sneeze, "to know—?"

"You ought to be in bed, and so ought I," said Geoff. "I will tell my mother, don't fear; but perhaps it will be as well not to say anything more just at present. Master, you must really go this moment and take care of yourself. Come, and I will see you to your room——"

"Ah! it is my part to look after you, Geoff," said good Mr. Tritton, "It might be supposed—her ladyship might think—that I had neglected——"

"Come along," said Geoff, arbitrarily, "to bed." And how glad he was to stretch out his own young limbs, and forget everything in the profound sleep of his age! Mr. Tritton had very much the worst of it. He did nothing but sneeze for the next two hours, waking himself up every time he went to sleep; and his head ached, and his eyes watered, and the good man felt thoroughly wretched.

"Oh, there is that poor Mr. Tritton with one of his bad colds again," Lady Stanton said, who was disturbed by the sound; and, though she was a good woman, the pity in her face was not unmixed by other sentiments. "We shall have nothing but sneezing for

the next month," she said to herself in an undertone. And doubtless still less favourable judgments were pronounced down stairs. A glass was found on the table of the library in which Mr. Tritton, good man, had taken some camphor by way of staving off his cold while he sat and watched. Harris the butler, perversely and unkindly (for who could mistake the smell of camphor?) declared that "old Tritton had been making a night of it. He don't surprise me with his bad colds," said that functionary; "look at the colour of his nose!" And indeed it could not be denied that this was red, as the nose of a man subject to fits of sneezing is apt to be.

When Geoff woke in the broad sunshine, and found that it was nearly noon, his first feeling of consternation was soon lost in the strange realization of all that had happened since his last waking, which suddenly came upon his mind like something new, and more real than before. The perspective even of a few hours' sleep makes any new fact or discovery more distinct. So many emotions had followed each other through his mind, that such an interval was necessary to make him feel the real importance of all that he had heard and seen. 'Lizabeth Bampfylde had said what there was to say in a few words, but the facts alone were sufficient to make the strange story clear. The chief difficulty was that Geoff had never heard of the elder son, whom the vagrant called his gentleman brother, and to whom the family and more than the family seem to have been sacrificed. He did not remember any mention of the Bampfylde except of the mother and daughter who had helped John Musgrave to escape, and one of whom had disappeared with him, and the

mystery which surrounded this other individual, who seemed really the chief actor in the tragedy, had yet to be made out. His mind was full of this as he dressed hastily, with sundry interruptions. The household had not quite made out the events of the past night, but that there had been something "out of the common" was evident to the meanest capacity. The library window had been open all night, which was the fault of Mr. Tritton, who had undertaken to close it, begging Harris to go to bed, and not to mind. Mr. Tritton himself had been seen by an early scullion in his white tie, very much ruffled, at six o'clock; and the volleys of sneezing which had disturbed the house at seven had been distinctly heard moving about like musketry on a march, now at one point, now another, of the corridor and stairs. To crown all these strange commotions was the fact that the young master of the house, instead of obeying Harris's call at half-past seven, did not budge (and then with reluctance) till eleven o'clock. If all these occurrences meant nothing, why then Mr. Harris pronounced himself a Dutchman; and the wonder breathed upwards from the kitchen and housekeeper's room to my lady's chamber, where her maid did all a maid could do (and this is little, as most heads of a family know) to awaken suspicion. It was suggested to her ladyship that it was very strange that Mr. Tritton should have been walking about the house at six in the morning, waking up my lady with his sneezings—and it was a mercy there had not been a robbery, with the library window "open to the ground," left open all night: and then for my lord to be in bed at eleven was a thing that had never happened before since his lordship had the measles. "I hope he is not

sickening for one of these fevers," Lady Stanton's attendant said.

This made Geoff's mother start, and give a suppressed scream of apprehension, and inquire anxiously whether there was any fever about. She had already in her cool drawing-room, over her needlework, felt a vague uneasiness. Geoff had never, since those days of the measles, missed breakfast and prayers before; he had sent her word that he had overslept himself, that he had been sitting up late on the previous night—but altogether it was odd. Lady Stanton, however, subdued her panic, and sat still and dismissed her maid, waiting with many tremors in her soul till Geoff should come to account for himself. He had been the best boy in the world, and had never given her any anxiety; but all Lady Stanton's neighbours had predicted the coming of a time when Geoff would "break out," and when the goodness of his earlier days would but increase the riot of the inevitable sowing of wild oats. Lady Stanton had smiled at this, but with a smouldering sense of insecurity in her heart; alarmed, though she knew there was no cause. Mothers are an order of beings peculiarly constituted, full of certainties and doubts, which moment by moment give each other the lie. Ah, no, Geoff would not "break out," would not "go wrong;" it was not in him. He was too true, too honourable, too pure—did not she know every thought in his mind, and feeling in his heart? But oh, the anguish if Geoff should not be so true and so pure—if he should be weak, be tempted and fall, and stain the whiteness which his mother so deeply trusted in, yet so trembled for! Who can understand such paradoxes? She would have believed no harm of her boy

—and yet in her horror of harm for him the very name of evil gave her a panic. Nothing wonderful in that. She sat and trembled to the very tyings of her shoe, and yet was sure, certain, ready to answer to the whole world for her son, who had done no evil. Other women who have sons know what Lady Stanton felt. She sat nervously still, listening to every sound, till he should come and explain himself. Why was he so late? What had happened last night to make the house uneasy? Lady Stanton would not allow herself to think that she was alarmed. It was true that pulses beat in her ears, and her heart mounted to her throat, but she sat as still as a statue, and went on with her knitting. “One may not be able to help being foolish, but one can always help showing it,” she said to herself.

The sight of Geoff when he appeared, fresh and blooming, made all the throbbings subside at once. She even made a fine effort to laugh. “What does this mean, Geoff? I never knew you so late. The servants have been trying to frighten me, and I hear Mr. Tritton has got a very bad cold,” she said, getting the words out hurriedly, afraid lest she might break down or betray herself. She eyed him very curiously over her knitting, but she made believe not to be looking at him at all.

“Yes; poor old Tritton,” he said; “it is my fault; he sat up for me. I went out——” he made a little pause; for Geoff reflected that other people’s secrets were not his to confide, even to his mother—“with Wild Bampfylde, who came, I suppose, out of gratitude for what little I did for him.”

“You went out—with that poacher fellow, Geoff?”

“Yes:” he nodded, meeting her horrified eyes quite

calmly and with a smile; "why not, mother? You did not think I should be afraid of him, I hope?"

"Oh how very imprudent, Geoff! You, whose life is of so much value!—who are so very important to me and everybody!"

"Most fellows are important who have mothers to make a fuss," he said, smiling. "I don't think there is much more in me than the rest. But he has not harmed me much, you can see. I have all my limbs as usual; I am none the worse."

"Thank God for that!" said Lady Stanton; "but you must not do the like again. Indeed, indeed, Geoff, you are too bold; you must not put yourself in the way of trouble. Think of your poor brother. Oh, my dear, what an example! You must not be so rash again."

"I will not be rash—in that way," he said. "But, mother, I want you to tell me something. You remember all about it: did you ever know of any more Bamfylde's? There was the mother, and this fellow. Did you ever know of any other?"

"You are missing out the chief one, Geoff—Lily, the girl."

"Yes, yes; I know about her. I did not mean the girl. But think! Were those three all? Were there more—another——?"

Lady Stanton shook her head. "I do not remember any other. I think three were quite enough. There is mischief in one even, of that kind."

"What do you mean by that kind? You did not know them. I hope my mother is not one of the kind who, not knowing people, are unjust to them."

"Geoff!" Lady Stanton was bewildered by this

grand tone. She looked up at him with sudden curiosity, and this curiosity was mixed inevitably with some anxiety too; for, when your son betrays an unjustifiable partisanship, what so natural as to feel that he must have "some motive"? "Of course I did not mean to be unjust. But I do not pretend to remember everything that came out on the trial. It was the mother and daughter that interested me. You should ask your cousin Mary; she recollects better than I do. But have you heard anything about another? What did the poacher say? Had you a great deal of conversation with him? And don't you think it was rash to put yourself in the power of such a lawless sort of fellow? Thank God! you are safe and sound."

"What do you mean about putting myself in his power? Do you think I am not a match for him? He is not such a giant, mother. Yes, I am quite safe and sound. And we had a great deal of talk. I never met with anybody so interesting. He talked about everything; chiefly about 'the creatures,' as he calls them."

"What creatures?" said Lady Stanton, wondering and alarmed. There were "creatures" in the world, this innocent lady knew, about whom a vagabond was very likely to talk, but who could not be mentioned between her and her boy.

"The wild things in the woods, birds and mice, and such small deer, and all their ways, and what they mean, and how to make acquaintance with them. I don't suppose he knows very much out of books," said young Geoff; "but the bit of dark moor grew quite different with that wild fellow in it—like the hill in the *Lady of the Lake*, when all Clan Alpine got up from behind the rocks and the bushes. Don't you re-

member, mother? One could hear 'the creatures' rustling and moving, and multitudes of living things one never gave a thought to. It felt like poetry, too, though I don't know any poem like it. It was very strange and interesting. That pleases me more than your clever people," said Geoff.

"Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon," said Lady Stanton, suddenly getting up and kissing her boy's cheek as she passed him. She went away to hide the penitence in her eyes. As for Geoff, he took this very easily and simply. He thought it was natural she should apologize to Bampfylde for not thinking well of him. He had not a notion of the shame of evil-thinking thus brought home to her, which scorched Lady Stanton's cheeks.

CHAPTER III.

Cousin Mary's Opinion.

GEOFF spent the remainder of this day at home, looking once more over the file of old newspapers in which the Musgrave case was printed at such length, the *Times* and the local papers, with all their little diversities of evidence, one supplementing another; but he could not make out any reference at all distinct to a third person in the story. The two suitors of the village beauty, one of whom she preferred in feeling, though the second of them had evidently made her waver in her allegiance by the attractions of his superior rank and wealth, were enough to fill up the canvas. They were so naturally and appropriately pitted against each other, that neither the curiosity of the period nor the art of the story-teller required any additional actor in the little tragedy. What more natural than that these two rivals should meet—should go from angry words to blows—and that, in the frenzy of the moment, one should give to the other the fatal but unpremeditated stroke which made an end of his rivalry and his life? The public imagination is simple, and loves a simple story, and this was so well-constructed and well-balanced—perfect in all its parts. What more likely than that the humble coquette should hesitate and almost swerve from her faith to her accepted lover when the young lord, so much more splendid than the young squire, came on the scene?

or that, when her wavering produced such fatal consequences, the poor girl, not being wicked, but only foolish, should have devoted herself with heroism to the man whom she had been the means of drawing into deadly peril? Geoff, however, with his eyes enlightened, could dimly perceive the traces of another person unaccounted for, who had appeared casually in the course of the drama. Indeed, the counsel for the prosecution had expressed his regret that he could not call this person as a witness, as he was supposed to have emigrated, and no trace could be found of him. His name, however, was not mentioned, though the counsel for the defence, evidently in complete ignorance, taunted his learned brother with the non-appearance of this mysterious stranger, and defied him to prove, by the production of him, that there had ever been feelings of bitter animosity between Musgrave and Lord Stanton. "The jury would like to know more about this anonymous gentleman," the coroner had said. But no evidence had ever been produced. Geoff searched through the whole case carefully, making various notes, and feeling that he himself, anxious as he had been, had never before noticed, except in the most incidental way, these slight, mysterious references. Even now he was misty about it. He was so tired, indeed, that his mind was less clear than usual; and when good Mr. Tritton appeared in the afternoon, very red with perpetual sneezing, his eyes running as with tears, he found Geoff in the library, in a great chair, with all the papers strewed about, sleeping profoundly, the old yellow *Times* in his hand, and the *Dalesman's Gazette* at his feet. The young man jumped up when Mr. Tritton laid his hand on his shoulder,

with quite unnecessary energy, almost knocking down his respected instructor. "Take care, take care, Geoff!" he cried; "I am not going to hurt you, my boy!" a speech which amused Geoff greatly, who could have picked Mr. Tritton up and thrown him across his shoulder. This interruption of his studies stopped them for the time; but next morning—not without causing his mother some anxiety—he proposed to ride over once more to Elfdale, to consult cousin Mary.

"It is but two days since we left, my dear," Lady Stanton said, with a sigh, thinking of all she had heard on the subject of "elderly sirens;" but Geoff showed her so clearly how it was that he must refer his difficulties to the person most qualified to solve them, that his mother yielded; though she too began to ask herself why her son should be so much concerned about John Musgrave. What was John Musgrave to Geoff? She did not feel that it was quite appropriate that the person most interested about poor Walter's slayer should be Walter's successor, he who had most profited by the deed.

Geoff, however, had his way, and went to his cousin Mary with a great deal of caution and anxiety, to hear all that she knew, and carefully to conceal from her what he knew. He found her fortunately by herself, in the languor of the afternoon, even Annie and Fanny having left her for some garden game or other. Lady Stanton the younger was much surprised to see her young cousin, and startled by his sudden appearance. "What is the matter?" she asked, with a woman's ready terror; and was still more surprised that nothing was the matter, and that Geoff was but paying her a simple visit. It may even be suspected that for a moment

his mother's alarm communicated itself to Mary. Was it to see *her* the boy had come back so soon and so far? The innocent, kind woman was alarmed. She had known herself a beauty for years, and she knew the common opinion (not in her experience quite corroborated by fact) that for a beautiful face a man will commit any folly. Was she in danger ("at my age!") of becoming a difficulty and a trouble to Geoff? But Geoff soon relieved her mind, making her blush hotly at her own self-conceit and folly.

"I have come to ask you some questions," he said; "you remember the man, the poacher, whom you spoke to me about—the brother, you know?—Bampfylde, whom they call Wild Bampfylde?"

"I know," said Lady Stanton, with a suppressed shiver.

"I met him—the other night—and we got talking. I want you to tell me, Cousin Mary: did you ever hear of—another of them—a brother they had?"

"Ah! that is it," said Lady Stanton, clasping her hands together.

"That is what? Do you know anything about him? I should like to find out; from something they—from something this poacher fellow said—he is not a bad fellow," said Geoff, in an undertone, with a kind of apology in his mind to the vagrant of whom he seemed to be speaking disrespectfully.

"Oh, Geoff, don't have anything to do with them, dear. You don't know the ways of people like that. Young men think it is fine to show that they are above the prejudices of their class, but it never comes to any good. Poor Walter, if he had never seen her face, might have been—and poor John—"

"But, Cousin Mary, about the brother?"

"Yes: he was their brother, but we did not find it out for a long time. He was very clever, they said, and a scholar, but ashamed to belong to such poor people. He never went there when he could help it. He took no notice, I believe, of the others. He pretended to be a stranger visiting the Lakes."

"Cur!" said Geoff.

"Ye—es: it was not—nice; but it must be a temptation, Geoff, when a man has been brought up so differently. Some relation had given him his education, and he was very clever. I have never felt sure whether it was a happy thing for a boy to be brought so far out of his class. He met John Musgrave somewhere, but John did not know who he was. And just about the time it all happened he went away. I used to think perhaps he might have known something; but I suppose he thought it would all come out, and his family be known. Fancy being ashamed of your own mother, Geoff! But it was hard upon him too—an old woman who would tell your fortune—who would stand with her basket in the market, you know: and he a great scholar, and considered a gentleman. It *was* hard; I don't excuse him, but I was sorry for him; and I always thought if he came back again, that he might know——"

Lady Stanton was not accustomed to speak so long and continuously. Her delicate cheeks were stained with red patches; her breath came quick.

"Do you mean to say he has turned up again—at last?" she added, with a little gasp.

"I have heard of him," said Geoff. "I wondered—if he could have anything to do with it."

"I will tell you all about him, Geoff. It was John Musgrave who met with him somewhere. Mary could tell you, too. She was John's only sister, and I her great friend; and I always took an interest. They met, I think, abroad—and he—was of use to John somehow—I forget exactly:—that is to say, Mr. Bampfield (he spelt his name differently from the others) did something for him—in short, John said he saved his life. It was among the Alps, on some precipice, or something of that sort. You see I can only give you my recollection," said Lady Stanton, falteringly conscious of remembering everything about it. "John asked him to Penninghame, but he would not come. He told us this new friend of his knew the country quite well, but no one could get out of him where he had lived. And then he came on a visit to some one else—to the Fieldings, at Langdale—that was the family; and we all knew him. He was very handsome; but who was to suppose that a gentleman visiting in such a house was old 'Lizabeth's son, or—or—that girl's brother? No one thought of such a thing. It was John who found it out at the very last. It was because of something about myself. Oh, Geoff, I was not offended—I was only sorry. Poor fellow! he was wrong, but it was hard upon him. He thought he—took a fancy to me; and poor John was so indignant. No, I assure you not on that account," said Lady Stanton, growing crimson to the eyes, and becoming incoherent. "Never! we were like brother and sister. John never had such a thought in his mind. I always—always took an interest in *him*—but there was never anything of *that* kind."

Young Geoff felt himself blush too, as he listened

to this confession. He coloured in sympathy and tender fellow-feeling for her; for it was not hard to read between the lines of Cousin Mary's humble story. John "never had such a thought in his mind;" but she "had always taken an interest." And the blush on her cheek and the water in her eyes told of that interest still.

Then Geoff grew redder still, with another feeling. The madman in the cottage had dared to lift his eyes to this woman so much above him.

"I don't wonder Musgrave was furious," he said.

"That is the right word," she said, with a faint smile; "he was furious; and Walter—your brother—laughed. I did not like that—it was insulting. We were all young people together. Why should not he have cared for—me?—when both of *them*——. But we must not think of that—we must not talk of that, Geoff—we cannot blame your poor brother. He is dead, poor fellow; and such a death, in the very flower of his youth! What were a few little silly boyish faults to that? He died, you know, and all the trouble came. Walter had been very stinging—very insulting, to that poor fellow just the day before, and he could not bear it. He went off that very day, and I have never heard of him again. I don't think people in general even knew who he was. The Fieldings do not to this day. But Walter's foolish joking drove him away. Poor Walter, he had a way of talking—and I suppose he must have found the secret out—or guessed. I have often—often wondered whether Mr. Bampfield knew anything, whether if he had come back he would have said anything about any quarrel between them. I used to pray for him to be found, and then I used to pray

that he might not be found; for I always thought he could throw some light—and, after all, what could that light be but of one kind?”

“Did any one ever—suspect—*him*?”

“Geoff! you frighten me. Him! whom? You know who was suspected. I don’t think it was intended, Geoff. I know—I know he did not mean it; but who but one could have done it? There could not, alas, be any doubt about that.”

“If Bampfield had been insulted and made angry, as you say, why should not he have been suspected as well as Musgrave? The one, it seems to me, was just as likely as the other——”

“Geoff! you take away my breath! But he was away; he left the day before.”

“Suppose it was found out that he did not go away, Cousin Mary? Was he more or less likely than Musgrave was to have done a crime?”

Lady Stanton looked at him with her eyes wide open, and her lips apart.

“You do not—mean anything? You have not—found out anything, Geoff?”

“I—can’t tell,” he said. “I think I have got a clue. If it were found out that Bampfield did not go away—that he was still here, and met poor Walter that fatal morning, what would you say then, you who knew them all?”

All the colour ebbed out of Lady Stanton’s face. She kept looking at him with wistful eyes, into which tears had risen, questioning him with an earnestness beyond speech.

“I dare not say the words,” she said, faltering; “I don’t venture to say the words. But, Geoff, you would

not speak like this if you did not mean something. Do you think—really *think*—oh, it is not possible—it is not possible!—it is only a fancy. You can't—suppose—that it matters—much—to me. You are only—speculating. Perhaps it ought not to matter much to me. But oh, Geoff! if you knew what that time was in my life. Do you mean anything—do you mean anything, my dear?”

“You have not answered my question,” he said. “Which was the most likely to have done a crime?”

Lady Stanton wrung her hands; she could not speak, but kept her eyes upon him in beseeching suspense.

Geoff felt that he had raised a spirit beyond his power to calm again, and he had not intended to commit himself or betray so soon what he had heard.

“Nothing must be known as yet,” he said; “but I think I have some reason to speak. Bampfield did not leave the country when you thought he did. He saw poor Walter that morning. If Musgrave saw him at all——”

Lady Stanton gave a little cry—“You mean Walter, Geoff?”

“Yes; if Musgrave saw him at all, it was not till after. And Bampfield was the brother of the girl John was going to marry, and had saved his life.”

“My God!” This was no profane exclamation in Mary's mouth. She said it low to herself, clasping her hands together, her face utterly colourless, her eyes wild with wonder and excitement. The shock of this disclosure had driven away the rising tears: and yet Geoff did not mean it as a disclosure. He had trusted in the gentle slowness of her understanding.

But there are cases in which feeling supplies all, and more than all, that intellect could give. She said nothing, but sat there silent, with her hands clasped, thinking it over, piecing everything together. No one like Mary had kept hold of every detail; she remembered everything as clearly as if (God forbid!) it had happened yesterday. She put one thing to another which she remembered but no one else did: and gradually it all became clear to her. Geoff, though he was so much more clever, did not understand the process by which in silence she arranged and perceived every point; but then Geoff had not the minute acquaintance with the subject nor the feeling which touched every point with interest. By and by Mary began to sob, her gentle breast heaving with emotion. "Oh, Geoff," she cried, "what a heart—what a heart! He is like our Saviour; he has given his life for his enemy. Not even his friend; he was not fond of him; he did not love him. Who could love him—a man who was ashamed of his own, his very own people? I—oh, how little and how poor we are! I might have done it perhaps for my friend; but he—he is like our Saviour."

"Don't say so. It was not just—it was not right; he ought not to have done it," cried Geoff. "Think, if it saved something, how much trouble it has made."

"Then it is all true!" she cried, triumphant. In perfect good faith and tender feeling Mary had made her comment upon this strange, sad revelation; yet she could not but feel all the same the triumph of having thus caught Geoff, and of establishing beyond all doubt that it was true. She fell a-crying in the happiness of the discovery. The moment it was cer-

tain, the solemnity of it blew aside, as do the mists before the wind. "Then he will come home again; he will have his poor little children, and all will be well," she said; and cried as if her heart would break. It was vain for Geoff to tell her that nothing was as yet proved, that he did not know how to approach the subject; no difficulties troubled Mary. Her heart was delivered as of a load; and why should not everything at once be told? But she wept all the same, and Geoff had no clue to the meaning of her tears. She was glad beyond measure for John Musgrave: but yet while he was an exile, who had (secretly) stood up for him as she had done? But when he came home, what would Mary have to do with him? Nothing! She would never see him, though she had always taken an interest, and he would never know what interest she had taken. How glad she was! and yet how the tears poured down!

Geoff had a long ride home. He was half alarmed that he had allowed so much to be known, but yet he had not revealed 'Lizabeth's secret. Mary had required no particulars, no proof. The suggestion was enough for her. She was not judge or jury—but one to whom the slightest outlet from that dark maze meant full illumination. Geoff could not but speculate a little on the surface of the subject as he rode along through the soft evening, in that unbroken yet active solitude which makes a long ride or walk the most pleasant and sure moment for "thinking over." Geoff's thoughts were quite superficial, as his knowledge was. He wondered if John Musgrave had "taken an interest" in Mary as she had done in him; and how it was that Mary had been his brother's betrothed, yet with so warm a

sympathy for his brother's supposed slayer? And how it was that John Musgrave, if he had responded at all to the "interest" she took in him, could have loved and married Lily? All this perplexed Geoff. He did not go any deeper; he did not think of the mingled feelings of the present moment, but only of the tangled web of the past.

It grew dark before he got home. No moon, and a cloudy night disturbed by threatenings or rather promise of rain, which the farmers were anxious for, as they generally are when a short break of fine weather bewilders their operations, in the north. As he turned out of the last cross road, and got upon the straight way to Stanton, he suddenly became aware of some one running by him on the green turf that edged the road, and in the shadow of the hedgerow. Geoff was startled by the first sight of this moving shadow running noiselessly by his side. It was a safe country, where there was no danger from thieves, and a "highwayman" was a thing of the last century. But still Geoff shortened his whip in his hand with a certain sense of insecurity. As he did so a voice came from the shadow of the hedge. "It is but me, my young lord." "You!" he cried. He was relieved by the sound, for a close attendant on the road in the dark, when all faces are alike undiscernible, is not pleasant. "What are you doing here, Bampfylde? Are you snaring my birds, or scaring them, or have you come to look after me?"

"Neither the one nor the other," said Wild Bampfylde. "I have other thoughts in my mind than the innocent creatures that harm no one. My young lord, I cannot tell you what is coming, but something is coming. It's

no you, and it's no me, but it's in the air; and I'm about, whatever happens. If you want me, I'll aye be within call. Not that I'm spying on you; but whatever happens, I'm here."

"And I want you. I want to ask you something," cried Geoff; but he was slow in putting his next question. It was about his cousin; and what he wanted was some one who would see, without forcing him to put them into words, the thoughts that arose in his mind. Therefore it was a long time before he spoke again. But in the silence that ensued it soon became evident to Geoff that the figure running along under the shadow of the bushes had disappeared. He stopped his horse, but heard no footfall. "Are you there Bampfylde?" but his own voice was all he heard, falling with startling effect into the silence. The vagrant had disappeared, and not a creature was near. Geoff went on with a strange mixture of satisfaction and annoyance. To have this wanderer "about" seemed a kind of aid, and yet to have his movements spied upon did not please the young man. But Bampfylde was no spy.

CHAPTER IV.

The Squire at Home.

THE Squire went home after his game of ducks and drakes in the most curious, bewildered state of mind. The shock of all these recent events had affected him much more than any one was aware, and Randolph's visit and desire to make sure about "family arrangements," had filled up the already almost overflowing measure of secret pain. It had momentarily recalled, like a stimulant too sharp and strong, not only his usual power of resistance, but a force of excitement strong enough to overwhelm the faculties which for the time it invigorated; and while he walked about his woods after his first interview with his son, the Squire was on the edge of a catastrophe, his brain reeling, his strained powers on the verge of giving way. The encounter with little Nello on the lake-side had exercised a curious arresting power upon the old and worn edifice of the mind which was just then tottering to its fall. It stopped this fall for the moment. The trembling old walls were not perhaps in a less dangerous state, but the wind that had threatened them dropped, and the building stood, shaken to its foundation, and at the mercy of the next blast, but yet so far safe—safe for the moment, and with all the semblance of calm about it. To leave metaphor, the Squire's mind was hushed and lulled by that encounter

with the soft peacefulness of childhood, in the most curious, and to himself, inexplicable way. Not, indeed, that he tried to explain. He was as unconscious of what was going on in himself as most of us are. He did not know that the various events which had shaken him had anything more than pain in them—he was unaware of the danger. Even Randolph's appearance and the thought of the discussions which must go on when his back was turned, as to the things that would happen after his death—he was not aware that there was more in them than an injury against which his whole spirit revolted. He did not know that this new annoyance had struck at the very stronghold of vitality, the little strength left to him. Which of us does know when the *coup-de-grâce* is given? He only knew the hurt—the wound—and the forlorn stand he had made against it, and the almost giddy lightness with which he had tried to himself to smile it down, and feel himself superior. Neither did he know what Nello had done for him. His meeting with the child was like the touch of something soft and healing upon a wound. The contact cooled and calmed his entire being. It seemed to put out of his mind all sense of wounding and injury. It did more; it took all distinctness at once from the moral and the physical landmarks round him. The harsher outlines of life grew blurred and dim, and instead of the bitter facts of the past, which he had so long determined to ignore, and the facts of the present which had so pushed themselves upon him, the atmosphere fell all into a soft confusion. A kind of happiness stole over him. What had he to be happy about? yet he was so. Sometimes in our English summers there is a mist of

heat in the air, confusing all the lines of the landscape as much as a fog in winter—in which the hills and lakes and sky are nothing but one dazzle and faint glory of suppressed light and warmth—light confusing but penetrating: warmth perhaps stifling to the young and active, but consolatory to those whose blood runs chill. This was the mental condition in which the Squire was. His troubles seemed to die away, though he had so many of them. Randolph, his middle-aged son, ceased to be an assailant and invader, and dropped into the dark like other troublesome things—not a son to be proud of, but one to put up with easily enough. John? he did not remember much about John; but he remembered very distinctly his old playfellow little Johnny, his little brother. “Eighteen months—only eighteen months between them:” he almost could hear the tone in which his mother said that long ago. If Johnny had lived he would have been—how old would he have been now? Johnny would have been seventy-four or so had he lived—but the Squire did not identify the number of years. There was eighteen months between them, that was all he could remember, and of that he sat and mused, often saying the words over to himself, with a soft dreamy smile upon his face. He was often not quite clear that it was not Johnny himself, little Johnny, with whom he had been playing on the water-side.

This change affected him in all things. He had never been so entirely amiable. When Randolph returned to the assault, the Squire would smile and make no reply. He was no longer either irritated or saddened by anything his son might say—indeed he

did not take much notice of him one way or another, but would speak of the weather, or take up a book, smiling, when his son began. This was very bewildering to the family. Randolph, who was dull and self-important, was driven half frantic by it, thinking that his father meant to insult him. But the Squire had no purpose of any kind, and Mary, who knew him better, at last grew vaguely alarmed without knowing what she feared. He kept up all his old habits, took his walks as usual, dressed with his ordinary care—but did everything in a vague and hazy way, requiring to be recalled to himself when anything important happened. When he was in his library, where he had read and written and studied so much, the Squire arranged all his tools as usual, opened his book, even began to write his letters, putting the date—but did no more. Having accomplished that beginning, he would lean back in his chair and muse for hours together. It was not thinking even, but only musing; no subject abode with him in these long still hours, and not even any consistent thread of recollections. Shadows of the past came sailing—floating about him, that was all; very often only that soft, wandering thought about little Johnny, occupied all his faculties.—Eighteen months between them, no more! He rarely got beyond that fact, though he never could quite tell whether it was the little brother's face or another—his son's, or his son's son's—which floated through this mist of recollections. He was quite happy in the curious trance which had taken possession of him. He had no active personal feelings, except that of pleasure in the recollection and thought of little Johnny—a thought which pleased and amused, and

touched his heart. All anger and harm went out of the old man; he spoke softly when he spoke at all, and suffered himself to be disturbed as he never would have done before. Indeed he was far too gentle and good to be natural. The servants talked of his condition with dismay, yet with that agreeable anticipation of something new which makes even a "death in the house" more or less desirable. "Th' owd Squire's not long for this world," the Cook and Tom Gardener said to each other. As for Eastwood, he shook his head with mournful importance. "I give you my word, I might drop a trayful of things at his side, and he wouldn't take no notice," the man said, almost tearfully; "it's clean again nature, that is." And the other servants shook their heads, and said in their turn that they "didn't like the looks of him," and that certainly the Squire was not long for this world.

This same event of Randolph's visit had produced other results almost as remarkable. It had turned little Liliass all at once into the slim semblance of a woman, grown-up, and full of thoughts. It is perhaps too much to say that she had grown in outward appearance as suddenly as she had done in mind; but it is no unusual thing in the calmest domestic quiet, where no commotion is, nor fierce, sudden heat of excitement to quicken a tardy growth, that the elder members of a family should wake up all in a moment to notice how a child has grown. She had perhaps been springing up gradually; but now in a moment every one perceived it; and the moment was coincident with that in which Liliass heard with unspeakable wrath, horror, shame, pity, and indignation, her father's story—that he would be put in prison if he came back; that he

dared not come back; that he might be—executed. (Lilias would not permit even her thoughts to say hanged—most ignominious of all endings—though Miss Brown had not hesitated to employ the word.) This suggestion had struck into her soul like a fiery arrow. The guilt suggested might have impressed her imagination also; but the horrible reality of the penalty had gone through and through the child. All the wonderful enterprises she had planned on the moment are past our telling. She would go to the Queen and get his pardon. She would go to the old woman on the hills and find out everything. Ah! what would she not do? And then had come the weary pilgrimage which Geoff had intercepted; and now the ache of pity and terror had yielded to that spell of suspense which, more than anything else, takes the soul out of itself. What had come to the child? Miss Brown said; and all the maids and Martuccia watched her without saying anything. Miss Brown, who had been the teller of the story, did not think of identifying it with this result. She said, and all the female household said, that if Miss Lily had been a little older, they knew what they would have thought. And the only woman in the house who took no notice was Mary—herself so full of anxieties that her mind had little leisure for speculation. She said, yes, Lilias had grown; yes, she was changing. But what time had she to consider Lilias' looks in detail? Randolph was Mary's special cross; he was always about, always in her way, making her father uncomfortable, talking at the children. Mary felt herself hustled about from place to place, wearied and worried and kept in perpetual commotion. She could not look into the causes of the Squire's strange

looks and ways; she could not give her attention to the children; she could scarcely even do her business, into which Randolph would fain have forced his way; while her all-investigating brother was close by. Would he but go away and leave the harassed household in peace!

But Randolph for his part was not desirous of going away. He could not go away, he represented to himself, without coming to some understanding with his father, though that understanding seemed as far off as ever. So he remained from day to day, acting as a special irritant to the whole household. He had nothing to do, and consequently he roamed about the garden, pointing out to the gardener a great many imperfections in his work; and about the stables, driving well-nigh out of his wits the steady-going, respectable groom, who nowadays had things very much his own way. He found fault with the wine, making himself obnoxious to Eastwood, and with the made dishes, exasperating Cook. Indeed there was nothing disagreeable which this visitor did not do to set his father's house by the ears. Finally sauntering into the drawing-room, where Mary sat, driven by him out of her favourite hall, where his comments offended her more than she could bear, he reached the climax of all previous exasperations by suddenly urging upon her the undeniable fact that Nello ought to go to school. "The boy," Randolph called him; nothing would have induced him to employ any pet name to a child, especially a foreign name like Nello—his virtue was of too severe an order to permit any such trifling. He burst out with this advice all at once. "You should send the boy to school; he ought to be at school. Old

Pen's lessons are rubbish. The boy should be at school, Mary," he said. This sudden fulmination disturbed Mary beyond anything that had gone before, for it was quite just and true. "And I know a place—a nice homely, good sort of place, where he would be well taught and well taken care of," he added. "Why should not you get him ready at once? and I will place him there on my way home." This was, to do him justice, a sudden thought, not premeditated—an idea which had flashed into his mind since he began to speak, but which immediately gained attractiveness to him, when he saw the consternation in Mary's eyes.

"Oh, thank you, Randolph," she said, faintly. Had not Mr. Pen advised—had not she herself thought of asking her brother's advice, who was himself the father of a boy, and no doubt knew better about education than she did? "But," she added, faltering, "he could not be got ready in a moment; it would require a little time. I fear that it would not be possible, though it is so very kind."

"Possible? Oh yes, easily possible, if you give your mind to it," cried Randolph; and he pointed out to her at great length the advantages of the plan, while Mary sat trembling, in spite of herself, feeling that her horror of the idea was unjustifiable, and that she would probably have no excuse for rejecting so reasonable and apparently kind a proposal. Was it kind? It seemed so on the outside; and how could she venture to impute bad motives to Randolph, when he offered to serve her? She did not know what reply to make; but her mind was thrown into sudden and most unreasonable agitation. She got up at last, agitated and

tremulous, and explained that she was compelled to go out to visit some of her poor people. "I have not been in the village since you came," she said, breathless in her explanations; "and there are several who are ill; and I have something to say to Mr. Pen."

"Oh, yes, consult old Pen, of course," Randolph had said. "I would not deprive a lady of her usual spiritual adviser because she happens to be my sister. Of course you must talk it over with Pen." This assumption of her dependence upon poor Mr. Pen's advice galled Mary, who had by no means elected Mr. Pen to be her spiritual adviser. However, she would not stay to argue the question, but hurried away anxiously with a sense of escape. She had escaped for the moment; yet she had a painful sense in her mind that she could not always escape from Randolph. The proposal was sudden, but it was reasonable and kind—quite kind. It was the thing a good uncle ought to do; no one but would think better of Randolph that he was willing to take so much trouble. Randolph for his part felt that it was very kind; he had no other meaning in the original suggestion; but when he had thus once put it forth, a curious expansion of the idea came into his mind. Little Nello was a terrible bugbear to Randolph. He had long dwelt upon the thought that it was he who would succeed to Penninghame on his father's death—at first, perhaps, nominally on John's account. But there was very little chance that John would dare the dangers of a trial, and reappear again, to be arraigned for murder, of which crime Randolph had always simply and stolidly believed him guilty; and the younger brother had entertained no doubt that, sooner or later, the unquestioned in-

heritance would fall into his hands. But this child baffled all his plans. What could be done while he was there? though there was no proof who he was, and none that he was legitimate, or anything but a little impostor: certainly, he was as far from being a lawful and proper English heir—such as an old family like the Musgraves ought to have—such as his own boy would be—as could be supposed. And of course, the best that could be done for himself was to send him to school. It was only of Nello that Randolph thought in this way. The little girl, though a more distinct individual, did not trouble him. She might be legitimate enough—another Mary, to whom, of course, Mary would leave her money—and there would be an end of it. Randolph did not believe, even if there had been no girl of John's, that Mary's money would ever come his way. She would alienate it rather, he felt sure—found a hospital for cats, or something of that description (for Mary was nothing but a typical old maid to Randolph, who regarded her, as an unmarried woman, with much masculine and married contemptuousness), rather than let it come to his side of the family. So let that pass—let the girl pass; but for the boy! That little, small, baby-faced Nello—a little nothing—a creature that might be crushed by a strong hand—a thing unprotected, unacknowledged, without either power or influence, or any one to care for him! how he stood in Randolph's way! But he did not at this moment mean him any harm; that is, no particular harm. The school he had suddenly thought of had nothing wrong in it; it was a school for the sons of farmers or poor clergymen, and people in "reduced circumstances." It would do Nello a great deal

of good. It would clear his mind from any foolish notion of being the heir. And he would be out of the way; and once at school, there is no telling what may happen between the years of ten and twenty. But of one thing Randolph was quite sure—that he meant no harm, no particular harm, to the boy.

When Mary left him in this hurried way, he strolled out in search of something to amuse or employ the lingering afternoon. Tom Gardener now gave him nothing but sullen answers, and the groom began to dash about pails of water, and make hideous noises as soon as he appeared, so that it did not consist with his dignity to have anything more to say to these functionaries; so that sheer absence of occupation, mingled with a sudden interest in the boy, on whose behalf he had thus been suddenly “led” to interfere, induced Randolph to look for the children. They were not in their favourite place at the door of the old hall, and he turned his steps instinctively to the side of the water, the natural attraction to everybody at Penninghame. When he came within sight of the little cove where the boats lay, he saw that it was occupied by the little group he sought. He went towards them with some eagerness, though not with any sense of interest or natural beauty such as would have moved most people. Nello was seated on the edge of the rocky step relieved against the blue water; Lillas placed higher up, with the wind ruffling her brown curls, and the slant sunshine grazing her cheek. The boy had a book open on his knees, but was trying furtive ducks and drakes under cover of the lesson, except when Lillas recalled him to it, when he resumed his learning with much demonstration, saying it over under his breath with

visibly moving lips. Liliás had got through her own portion of study. Mr. Pen's lessons were not long or severe, and she had a girl's conscientiousness and quickness in learning. Her book was closed on her knee; her head turned a little towards that road which she watched with a long dreamy gaze, looking for some one—but some one very visionary and far away. Her pensive, abstracted look and pose, and the sudden growth and development which had so suddenly changed Liliás, seemed to have charmed the little girl out of childhood altogether. Was she looking already for the fairy prince, the visionary hero? And to say the truth, though she was still only a child, this was exactly what Liliás was doing. It was the knight-deliverer, the St. George who kills the dragon, the prince with shoes of swiftness and invisible coat, brought down to common life, and made familiar by being entitled "Mr. Geoff," for whom, with that kind of visionary childish anticipation which takes no note of possibilities, she was looking. Time and the world are at once vaster, and vaguer, and more narrow at her age than at any other. He might come *now*, suddenly appearing at any moment; and Liliás could not but feel vaguely disappointed every moment that he did not appear. And yet there was no knowing when he would come, to-morrow, next year, she could not tell when. Meanwhile she kept her eyes fixed on the distance, watching for him. But Liliás was not thinking of herself in conjunction with "Mr. Geoff." She was much too young for love; no flutter of even possible sentiment disturbed the serenity of her soul. Nevertheless her mind was concentrated upon the young hero as entirely as the mind of any dreaming maiden could be. He was more than her

hero; he was her representative, doing for her the work which perhaps Liliás was not old enough or strong enough to do. So other people, grown-up people, thought at least. And until he came she could do nothing, know nothing. Already, by this means, the child had taken up the burden of her womanhood. Her eyes "were busy in the distance shaping things," that made her heart beat quick. She was waiting already, not for love to come, of which at her age she knew nothing, but for help to come, which she would have given her little life to bestow, but could not, her own hand being too slight and feeble to give help. This thought gave her a pang, while the expectation of help kept her in that woman's purgatory of suspense. Why could not she do it herself? but yet there was a certain sweetness in the expectation which was vague, and had not existed long enough to be tedious. And yet how long, how long it was even since yesterday! From daylight to dusk, even in August, what a world of time. Every one of these slow, big round hours, floated by Liliás like clouds when there is no wind, moving imperceptibly; great globes of time never to be done with. Her heart gave a throb whenever any one appeared. But it was Tom Gardener, it was Mr. Pen, it was some one from the village, it was never Mr. Geoff; and finally here was some one quite antagonistic, the enemy in person, the stranger whom people called Uncle Randolph. Liliás gave her little brother a note of warning; and she opened her own book again.

When Randolph approached, they had thus the air of being very busily employed, both;—Liliás intent upon her book, while Nello, furtively feeling in his pocket for the stones which he had stored there for

use, busied himself, to all appearance, with his lesson, repeating it to himself with moving lips. Randolph had taken very little notice of the children, except by talking at them to his sister. He came to a pause now, and looked at them with curiosity—or at least he looked at Nello; for after all, it did not matter about the girl. She might be John's daughter, or she might not; but in any case she was not worth a thought. He did not see the humour of the preternatural closeness of study which the children exhibited; but it afforded a means of opening communications.

"Are these your lessons for Mr. Pennithorne?" he said.

Nello, to whom the question was addressed, made no answer. Was he not much too busy to answer? his eyes were riveted upon his book. Liliás kept silence too as long as politeness would let her; but at last the rudeness of it struck her acutely. This might be an enemy, but children ought not to be rude. She therefore said timidly, "Yes;" and added, by way of explanation, "Nello's is Latin; but me, it is only English I have."

"Is it hard?" said Randolph, still directing his question to the boy.

Nello gave a glance out of the corner of his eyes at his questioner, but said nothing, only learned harder than ever; and again it became needful, for the sake of courtesy, that Liliás should answer.

"The Latin is not hard," she said; "oh, not near so hard as the English. It is so easy to say; but Mr. Pen does not know how it goes; he says it all wrong; he says it like English. I hope Nello will not learn it that way."

Randolph stared at her, but took no further notice. "Can't you speak?" he said to Nello, "when I ask you a question? Stop your lesson and listen to me. Shouldn't you like to go to school?"

Nello looked up with round astonished eyes, and equally roundly, with all the force of the monosyllable, said "No," as probably he would have answered to any question.

"No? but you don't know what school is; not lessons only, but a number of fellows to play with, and all kinds of games. You would like it a great deal better than being here, and learning with Mr. Pennithorne."

"No," said Nello again; but his tone was less sure, and he paused to look into his questioner's face. "Would Lily come too?" he said, suddenly accepting the idea. For from No to Yes is not a very long way at eight years old.

"Why, you don't want to drag a girl with you," said Randolph, laughing; "a girl who can't play at anything, wherever you go?"

This argument secured Nello's attention. He said, "N—no," reddening a little, and with a glance at Lillas, against whose sway he dared scarcely rebel all at once; but the sense of superiority even at such an early age is sweet.

"He must not go without me," cried Lillas, roused. "I am to take care of him *always*! Papa said so. Oh, don't listen, Nello, to this—gentleman! You know what I told you—papa is perhaps coming home. Mr. Geoff said—Mr. Geoff knows something that will make everything right again. Mr. Geoff is going to fetch papa——"

"Oh!" cried Nello, reproachfully, "you said I was not to tell; and there, you have gone and told yourself!"

"What is that? what is that?" asked Randolph, pricking up his ears.

But the boy and girl looked at each other and were silent. The curious uncle felt that he would most willingly have whipped them both, and that amiable sentiment showed itself in his face.

"And, Lily," said Nello, "I think the old gentleman would not let me go. He will want me to play with; he has never had anybody to play with for—I don't know how long—never since a little boy called little Johnny: and he said that was my name too——"

"Oh, Nello! now it is you who are forgetting; he said (you know you told me) that you were never, never to tell!"

Randolph turned from one to another, bewildered. What did they mean? Had they the audacity to play upon his fears, the little foundlings, the little impostors! He drew a long breath of fury, and clenched his fist involuntarily. "Children should never have secrets," he said. "Do you know it is wicked, very wicked? You ought to be whipped for it. Tell me directly what you mean!"

But this is not the way to get at any child's secret. The brother and sister looked at each other, and shut fast their mouths. As for Nello, he felt the edges of that stone in his pocket, and thought he would like to throw it at the man. Liliás had no stone, and was not warlike; but she looked at him with the calm of superior knowledge. "It would be dishonourable," she said, faltering over the pronunciation, but firm in

the sentiment, "to tell what we were told not to tell."

"You are going to school with me—on Saturday," said Randolph, with a virulence of irritation which children are just as apt to call forth as their elders. "You will be taught better there; you will not venture to conceal anything, I can tell you, my boy."

And he left them with an angry determination to carry out his plans, and to give over Nello to hands that would tame him effectually, "the best thing for him." The children, though they had secretly enjoyed his discomfiture, were a little appalled by this conclusion. "Oh, Nello, I will tell you what he is—he is the wicked uncle in the *Babes in the Wood*. He will take you and leave you somewhere, where you will lose yourself and starve, and never be heard of. But I will find you. I will go after you. I will never leave you!" cried Liliias with sudden tears.

"I could ask which way to go," said Nello, much impressed, however, by this view. "I can speak English now. I could ask the way home; or something better!—listen, Lily—if he takes me, when we have gone ten miles, or a hundred miles, I will run away!"

CHAPTER V.

A New Visitor.

NOTWITHSTANDING her dislike to have it supposed that Mr. Pen was her spiritual adviser, Mary did make a hurried visit to the Vicarage to ask his advice. Not that she had much confidence in the good vicar's advice; but to act in such a case, where experience fails you altogether, entirely on your own judgment without even the comfort of "talking it over," is a hard thing to do. "Talking it over" is always an advantage. The for and against of any argument are always clearer when they are put into words and made audible, and thus acquire, as it were, though they may be your own words, a separate existence. Thus Mary became her own adviser when she consulted Mr. Pen, and there was no one else at hand who could fulfil this office. They talked it over anxiously, Mr. Pen being, as she knew he would be, entirely on Randolph's side. To him it appeared that it would be a great advantage for Nello to be taken to school by his uncle. It would be "the right thing to do"—better than if Mary did it—better than Mr. Pen, himself could do it. Mary could not find any arguments to meet this conventional certainty. She retained her distrust and fear, but she could not say anything against the fact that it was kind of Randolph to propose this, and that it would be injurious and unkind on her part to reject it. She went home dispirited and cast down, but set to work

at once with the practical preparations. Saturday was the day on which Randolph had said he must go—and it was already Thursday—and there was not a moment to lose. But it was not till the Friday afternoon, the eve of separation, that Miss Musgrave could screw her courage to the point of informing the children what lay before them. The afternoon was half over, and the sun beginning to send long rays aslant from the west. She came in from the village, where she had gone in mere restlessness, feeling that this communication could be delayed no longer; but she disliked it so much herself that the thought of Nello's consternation and the tears of Liliias was almost more than their tender guardian could bear.

But when she came in sight of the old hall door, a group encountered her which bewildered Mary. A young man on horseback had drawn up at the side of the ascent, and with his hat off, and the sun shining upon his curling hair and smiling countenance, was looking up and talking to little Liliias, who leaned over the low wall, like a lady of romance looking over her battlements. The sun gleamed full upon Liliias too, lighting up her dark eyes and warmly-tinted cheek and the hair which hung about her shoulders, and making a pretty picture. Her face was full of earnest meaning, grave and eager and tremulous. Nello, at the hall door, above this strange pair, contemplated them with a mixture of jealousy and wonder. Mary had come upon them so suddenly that she could hear the young man answering something to the eager demands of the little girl. "But, you are sure, quite sure? Oh, are you certain, Mr. Geoff?" "Quite sure," he was saying. "But you must think

of me all the time, Lily; you must think of nothing but me—promise me that, and I shall not be afraid.”

“I promise!” cried Liliás, clasping her hands. Mary stood and listened altogether confounded, and Nello, from above, bewildered and only half satisfied, looked on. Who was the young man? It seemed to Miss Musgrave that she had seen him before. And what was it that had changed Liliás into this little princess, this small heroine? The heroic aspect, however, gave way before Mary could interfere, and the child murmured something softer, something less unlike the little girl with all whose ways Mary was familiar.

“But I always think of you,” she said; “always! since *that* day.”

“Do you, indeed, my little Lily? That makes me happy. You must always keep up so good a custom.”

And the young man smiled, with eyes full of tenderness, and took the child’s hand and held it in his own. Liliás was too young for any comment or false interpretation, but what did it mean? The spectator behind, besides was too much astonished to move.

“Good-bye, my Lily; good-bye, Nello,” cried the young man, nodding his head to the children. And then he put on his hat and rode round the corner towards the door.

Liliás stood looking after him, like a little saint in an ecstasy. She clasped her hands again, and looked up to the sky, her lips moving, and tears glittering in her eyes.

“Oh, Nello, don’t you think God will help him?” she said, one tear overbrimming suddenly, and rolling down her cheek. She started when Mary, with tones a little sharpened by consternation, called her. Liliás

had no sense of shame in her innocent mind, but as there is no telling in what light those curious beings called grown-up people might regard a child's actions, a little thrill of alarm went through her. What might Mary say? What would she think when she knew that Mr. Geoff "had come to set everything right about papa?" Lillas felt instinctively that Geoff's mission would not appear in exactly the same light to Mary as it did to herself. She turned round with a sudden flush of surprise and agitation on her face. It looked like the blush of a maturer sentiment to Mary.

"At twelve years old!" she said to herself. And unconsciously there glanced through her mind a recollection of the first Lily—the child's mother—she who had been the beginning of all the trouble. Was it in the blood?

"Who is that gentleman?" Mary asked, with much disturbance of mind. "Lillas! I could not have expected this of you."

Lillas followed into the hall, very still and pale, feeling herself a culprit, though she did not know why. Her hands dropped straight by her side, after the manner of a creature accused; and she looked up to Mary, with eyes full of vague alarm, into which the tears were ready to come at a moment's notice.

"I have not done anything wrong?" she said, turning her assertion into a faltering question. "It was Mr. Geoff."

"Mr. Geoff!—who is Mr. Geoff?"

"He is—very kind—oh, very kind, Mary; he is—some one who knows about papa: he is—the gentleman who once came with two beautiful horses in a carriage (oh, don't you remember, Nello?) to see *you*."

"Yes," said Nello, with ready testimony; "he said I should ride upon them. They were two bay horses, in one of those high-up funny carriages, not like Mary's carriage. I wonder if I might ride upon his horse now?"

"To see *me*?" Mary was entirely bewildered. "And what do you mean about your father?" she said. "Knows about papa! Liliass! come here; I am not angry. What does he know about papa?"

Liliass came up slowly to her side, half unwilling to communicate her own knowledge on this point. For Mary had not told her the secret, she remembered suddenly. But the confusion of Liliass was interrupted by something more startling and agitating. Eastwood came into the hall, with a certain importance and solemnity. "If you please, ma'am," he said, "my Lord Stanton has just come in, and I've shown him into the library—to my master. I thought you would like to know."

"Lord Stanton—to my father, Eastwood? my father ought not to be troubled with strangers. Lord Stanton!—to be sure it was that boy. Quick, say that I shall be glad to see him up stairs."

"If you please, ma'am, his lordship asked for my master; and my master—he said, 'Yes, certainly.' He was quite smiling like, and cheerful. He said, 'Yes; certainly, Eastwood.' So, what was I to do? I showed his lordship in—and there they are now—as friendly—as friendly, if I may venture to make a comparison: His lordship," said Eastwood, prudently pausing before he committed himself to metaphor, "is, if I may make bold to say so, one of the nicest young gentlemen!"

Mary had risen hastily to interrupt this dangerous

interview, which alarmed her. She stood, paying no attention to Eastwood while the man was talking, feeling herself crowded and pressed on all hands by a multitude of thoughts. The hum of them was in her ears, like the sound of a throng of people. Should she go to the library, whatever her father might think of the interruption? Should she stop this meeting at all hazards? or should she let it go on, and that come which would? All was confusion around her, her heart beating loudly in her ears, and a hundred suggestions sounding through that stormy throbbing. But when Eastwood's commonplace voice, to which she had been paying no heed, stopped, Mary's thoughts came to a stop also. She grew faint, and the light seemed to vanish from her eyes.

The Squire had been sitting alone all day. He had seemed to all the servants (the most accurate of observers in such a case) more feeble than usual. His daughter, agitated and full of trouble about other things, had not remarked any change. But Eastwood had shaken his head down stairs, and had said that he did not like the looks of master. He had never been so gentle before. Whatever you said to him he smiled, which was not at all the Squire's way. And though he had a book before him, Eastwood had remarked that he did not read. He would cast his eyes upon his book when any one went in, but it was always the same page. Eastwood had made a great many pretences of business, in order to see how his master was—pretences which the Squire in his usual health would have put a stop to summarily, but which to-day he either did not observe at all, or received smilingly. In this way Eastwood had remarked a great

many things which filled him with dismay; for he liked his old master, and the place suited him to perfection. He noticed the helpless sort of way in which Mr. Musgrave sat; his knees feebly leaning against each other, his fingers falling in a heap upon the arm of his chair, his eyelids half covering his eyes. It was half the instinct of obedience, and half a benevolent desire to rouse his master, which made Eastwood introduce the visitor into the library without consulting Miss Musgrave. Judging by his own feelings, the man felt that nothing was so likely to stimulate and rouse up the Squire as a visit from a lord. There were not too many of them about; visitors of any kind, indeed, were not over plentiful at Penninghame; and a nice, cheerful, affable young lordship was a thing to do anybody good.

And Geoff went in, full of the mission he had taken in hand. It was a bold thing to do, after all he had heard of the inexorable old Squire who had shut his heart to his son, and would hear nothing of him, as everybody said. But it seemed to Geoff, in the rash generosity of his youth, that if he, who was the representative of the injured family, were to interfere, the other must be convinced—must yield, at least, to reason, and consent to consider the subject. But he did not expect a very warm reception, and went in with a beating heart.

Mr. Musgrave had risen up to receive him; he had not failed in any of his faculties. He could still hear as well as he did twenty years before, and Lord Stanton's name was unusual enough to call his attention for the moment. He had raised himself from his chair, and stood leaning forward, supporting himself with

both hands upon the writing-table before him. This had been a favourite attitude, when he had no occasion for support; but now the feeble hands leaned heavily with all the weight of his frame upon them. He said the name that had been announced to him with a wavering of suspicion in his tone, "Lord Stanton!" then pointed with a tremulous sweep of his hand to a seat, and himself dropped back into his chair. He was not the stern old chief whom Geoff expected to find in arms against every suggestion of mercy, but a feeble old man, smiling faintly, with a kind of veiled intelligence in his eyes. He murmured something about "an unusual pleasure," which Geoff could not make out.

"I have come to you, sir, about important business. I hope you will not think I am taking too much upon myself. I thought, as I was—the chief person on one side, and you on the other, that you might allow me to speak?"

Geoff was as nervous as a child; his colour went and came. It awed him, he could scarcely tell why, to see the feebleness of the old figure, the dreary, abstracted look in the old face.

"Surely—surely," said the old man. "Why should you not speak to me? Our family is perhaps better known; but yours Mr. ——— I mean, my Lord Stanton, yours is—"

He half forgot what he was saying, getting slower and slower, and now stopped all at once. Then, after a moment, rousing himself, resumed, with a wave of his hand, "Surely—you must say—what you have to say."

This was worse for Geoff than if he had forbidden

him altogether. What could he do to rouse interest in the old man's breast?

"I want to speak, sir," he said, faltering, "of your son."

"My son?—ah! yes, Randolph is here. He is too old for me—too old—not like a son. What does it matter who is your father when it comes to that age?"

"It was not Randolph, sir. I did not know him; but it is your other son—your eldest son, I mean—John."

"Eh?" The old man roused up a little. "John—that was my little brother; we called him Johnny—a delightful boy. There is just such another in the house now, I believe. I think he is in the house."

"Oh, sir!" said Geoff, "I want to speak to you—to plead with you for some one who is not in the house—for your son John—John who has been so long away. You know—don't you know whom I mean?—your eldest son, Mr. Musgrave—*John*, who left us and left everything so many years ago."

A wavering light came over the old man's face. He opened his eyes wide and gazed at Geoff, who, for his part, was too much troubled and alarmed to know what to do.

"Eh!" he said again, with a curious blank stare, "my—what? Son? but not Randolph. No more about sons, they are a trouble and a sorrow. To tell the truth I am drowsy rather. I suppose—I have not been very well. Have you seen the little boy?"

"The little boy?—your grandson, sir?"

"Eh! you call him that! He is just such another as little Johnny, my little brother, who was eighteen months younger than I. You were saying something

else, my—my—friend! But to tell the truth, this is all I am good for now. The elders would like to push us from the scene; but the little ones,” said the Squire, with a curious sudden break of laughter, which sounded full of tears, “the little ones—are fond of old people; that is all I am good for nowadays—to play with the little boy——”

“Oh, sir!” said Geoff in his eagerness, “it is something very different that is expected of you. To save the little boy’s father—your son—to bring him back with honour. It is honour, not shame that he deserves. I who am a stranger, who am the brother of the man who was killed, I have come to entreat you to do John Musgrave justice. You know how he has been treated. You know, to our disgrace, not his, that there is still a sentence against him. It is John Musgrave—John Musgrave we ought to think of. Listen to me—oh, listen to me! Your son——”

The old man rose to his feet, and stood wavering, gazing with troubled wide-open eyes, full of the dismal perplexity of an intelligence which feels itself giving way. “John Musgrave!” he said, with pale lips which trembled and dropped apart; and a thrill and trembling came over his whole frame. Geoff sprang up and came towards him in alarm to support him, but the Squire waved him away with both his tremulous hands, and gave a bewildered look round him as if for some other prop. Suddenly he caught sight of the little carved oak cupboard against the wall. “Ah!” he said, with an exclamation of relief. This was what he wanted. He turned and made a feeble step towards it, opened it, and took from it the cordial which he used in great emergencies, and to which he turned

vaguely in this utter overthrowal of all his forces now. But then ensued a piteous spectacle; all his strength was not sufficient to pour it out. He made one or two despairing efforts, then put the bottle and glass down upon the table with a low cry, and sank back into his chair. He looked at Geoff with the very anguish of feebleness in his eyes. "Ah!" he faltered, "it is true—they are right. I am old—old—and good for nothing. Let them push me away, and take my place." A few sobs, bitter and terrible, came with the words, and two or three tears dropped down the old man's grey-pale cheeks. The depth of mortal humiliation was in this last cry.

Geoff almost wept too in the profound pity of his generous young soul—it went to his very heart. "Let me help you," he cried, pouring out the cordial with anxious care. It was all the Squire could do to put it to his lips. He laid one of his trembling hands upon Geoff's shoulder as he gave back the glass, and whispered to him hoarsely, "Not Randolph," he said; "don't let Randolph come. Bring me—do you know?—the little boy."

"Yes, sir, yes," cried Geoff; "I understand."

The old Squire still held him with a hand which was heavy as lead upon his arm, "God bless you, my lad," he said. He did not know who Geoff was; but trusted to him as in utter prostration we trust to any hand held out to us. And a little temporary ease came with the potion. He smiled feebly once more, laid back his head, and closed his eyes. "My little Johnny!" he said; and his hands fell as Eastwood had described them, the fingers crumpled together all in a heap, upon the arms of his chair.

Geoff rushed out of the room with a beating heart, feeling himself all at once thrust into a position of importance in this unknown house. He had never seen death or its approach, and in his inexperience did not know how difficult it was to shuffle off the coils of mortality. He thought the old man was dying. Accordingly, he rushed up the slope to the old hall like a whirlwind, where Mary and the children were. "Come, come," he cried; "he is ill, very ill!" and snatching Nello's reluctant hand, ran back, dragging the child with him, who resisted with all his might. "Come, your grandfather wants you," cried Geoff. Mary followed, alarmed, and wondering, and—scarcely knowing where she went in her agitation—found herself, behind the young man and the boy, at the door of that sacred library which the children had never entered, and where their very existence was ignored. Her father was lying back in his great chair; Eastwood, whom Geoff had hastily summoned, standing behind. The old man's heavy eyes were watching the door, his old limbs huddled together in the chair, like something inanimate thrown down in a heap, and lying as it fell. At sight of this awful figure, little Nello gave a loud cry of childish terror, and turning round, would have fled but for Geoff, who stood behind him. At the sound of the child's voice, the old man roused himself feebly; he moved his arms—extending them in intention at least—and his lips with inaudible words. "Go to him, go to him!" cried Geoff in an imperative whisper. Little Nello was not without courage, though he was afraid. Finding the way of escape blocked up, he turned round again, stood irresolute for a moment, and then advanced with the strength of

desperation. The old man, with a last effort, put out his arms, and drew the child between his knees. "My little Johnny!" he said, with an only half-articulate outbreak of crying and strange laughter. Then his arms fell powerless; his head drooped on his breast. Nello broke out wildly into crying; but stood fascinated between the feeble knees.

Was he dead? Geoff thought so in his simplicity as he led the child away, and left Mary and the servants, whom he had summoned, in this death-chamber. He led Nello back to the hall, and sat down beside the children and talked to them in low tones. His mind was full of awe and solemn feeling; his own youth, and strength, and happiness seeming a kind of insult to the old and dying. He went back after a while very grave and humble, to ask how it was, and what he could do. But the Squire was not dead. He was stricken by that *avant-courier* of the great king, who kills the mind before the body dies. It was "a stroke," Eastwood said, in all the awe, yet importance, of so tragic an event. He had seen it coming for weeks before, he said.

CHAPTER VI.

In Suspense.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE was extremely annoyed at the turn things had taken. On the day of his father's seizure indeed a kind of serene solemnity came over him. He would not have been so indiscreet or indecorous as to admit that he was glad of the "stroke" which might terminate the Squire's life; such an evil sentiment was far from him. Still if his dear father was indeed in the providence of God to be taken away from this mortal scene, there was a sad satisfaction in having it happen while he was still at the Castle and ready to be of use. As the only male member of the family, it was indeed very important that he should be there on such a melancholy occasion. Mary would have enough on her hands with the nursing and the strictly feminine duties, and he was the only one to turn to, the only one who could do anything. He telegraphed to his wife what the sad occasion was that detained him, and went to bed with a comfortable sense that his visit had not been in vain. It was melancholy to think that all might be over before the morning; but yet he could do no good by staying up and wearing himself out. If it should so happen that his own sad prognostications were correct, why then he had occasion for all his strength, for he it would be who must do everything. And no martyr could have contemplated the stake with more elevated resignation

and satisfaction than Randolph looked at the labours and troubles he would have to take upon him. He lay down, solemnly going over them in his mind—the details of the funeral, the reading of the will, the taking possession of the estate. He resolved that he would take possession in his brother's name. No one knew where John was; he could not be called at a moment's notice like respectable men. Nor, indeed, would it be kind to think of such a thing as bringing him here to the endangerment of his life. No, he would take possession for his brother. He would put his brother's little son to school. The girl of course would go with Mary, who for her part must, he supposed, have the house on the way to Pennington, which was called the Dower-house, though he did not think an unmarried sister had any real right to a place which was intended for the widow of the previous Squire. But that might pass: Mary had been accustomed to have everything her own way, and she should have the Dower-house by grace at least, if not by right. He fell asleep as he was arranging all these things with a great deal of serious satisfaction. Of course it was sad: what is there in this vale of tears that is not mixed with sadness? But it was not (he said to himself) as if his father were a young man, or carried off in the midst of his work. He was old, he had lived out the life of man, he had arrived at the time when a man has a right to expect that his day is over, and must know that in the course of nature he ought to give place to his successors. And as things were to take such a serious turn, how well it was that he, Randolph, should be on the spot to do everything! His satisfaction in this was really the foremost feeling in his mind.

But all was not over in the morning, as Randolph had so certainly anticipated. He got up in the same solemnized but resigned and serene condition, and wondered a little to see how late it was. For indeed the turn things had taken, though so serious, had been peace-inspiring, removing anxiety from his mind, and he had slept later than usual in consequence. And it was clear that as yet there had been "no change." Eastwood, who was late too, having stayed up late on the previous night indulging the solemn excitement which was natural to this crisis, came in with profound seriousness and an air as solemn as Randolph's. "Just the same, sir," he said; "the doctor is with him now." Randolph could not help a slight sensation of disappointment. He had made up his mind so distinctly what was to happen, and there are cases in which even good news are out of place. It was with less resignation and more anxiety that he hurried out to hear what the doctor said.

And he was much provoked and annoyed when a week later there was still no progress made, and it became apparent that no such easy solution of all difficulties as he had expected was to be looked for. The Squire was in much the same state on the next Saturday and the next, and it was apparent that the illness was to be a lingering and tedious one—the kind of thing which wears out everybody round. When people are going to die, what a pity that they should not do it speedily, relieving both themselves and others! But nature, so often acting in a manner contrary to all prognostications, was not to be hurried. To jog her gently on, and relieve the sufferer authoritatively from his troubles, is not yet permissible in

England. On the contrary, medical science acts just the other way, with questionable mercy, prolonging lives in which there is nothing but suffering, and stimulating the worn-out machinery of the frame to go on a little longer, to suffer a little more, with all that wheezing and creaking of the rusty wheels which bears witness to the unnaturalness of the process. This was what Randolph felt with much restrained warmth of annoyance. It was unnatural; it was almost impious. Two doctors, a professional nurse, and Mary, who was as good, all labouring by every possible invention to keep mere life in their patient. Was it right to do so? Providence had evidently willed to release the old man, but science was forcing him to remain imprisoned in the flesh. It was very hard upon the Squire, and upon Randolph too, especially as the latter could not venture to express his real sentiments on this matter, but was compelled to be glad of every little sign of tenacity and vitality which the patient gave. If it had been recovery indeed, he said to himself, there might have been some reason for satisfaction; but as it was only holding by life, mere existing and nothing more, what ground was there for thankfulness? It would be better for the sufferer himself, better for everybody, that it should be over soon. After this state of things had lasted for a fortnight, Randolph could not bear it any longer. He sent for Mary from the sick-room, and gave her to understand that he must go.

"Had I expected he would last so long," he said, "I should have gone last week. Of course it does not matter for you who have nothing else to do; but my work and my time are of importance. If anything were likely to happen directly, of course I should think it

my duty to stay; but, so far as I can see, nothing is likely to happen," said Randolph in an aggrieved tone. Mary was too sad to laugh and too languid to be angry, but there came a gleam of mingled resentment and amusement into her eyes.

"It is not for us to wish that anything should happen," she said.

"Wish? Did I talk of wishing? I stated a fact. And in the meantime my parish is being neglected and my work waiting for me. I cannot hang on here for ever. Of course," Randolph added, "if anything should happen, you have only to telegraph, and I will come."

"I don't see that it is necessary, Randolph. My father may rally, or he may linger for months, the doctors say; and whatever happens—of course you shall hear immediately; but so far as I am concerned, it does not seem necessary to disturb your work and unsettle your parish——"

"That is ridiculous; of course I shall come the moment I am summoned. It is quite essential that there should be some man to manage matters. And the boy is all ready," he added; "you had his outfit prepared before my father's attack came on. Let them pack up for him, and on Friday we shall go."

"The boy! How could I send him away now, when my father might recover his consciousness, and want him?"

"My father want him? This is too much," said Randolph—"my father, from whom you concealed his very existence—who never cared for children at any time. My *father*? What could he possibly want with the boy? He should have gone a fortnight ago. I wrote to enter his name of course, and the money is

running on. I can't afford to pay for nothing whatever you may do, Mary. Let his things be packed up, and let him go with me."

"I think your brother is right," said the Vicar, who was present. "Nello is doing no good with me. We have been so much disturbed with all that has taken place; and Emily has been so poorly—you know how poorly she has been—and one feels with one's own children the time can always be made up somehow. That is the worst of lessons at home," said Mr. Pen, with a sigh.

"But my father sent for him—wanted him; how can I send the child away? Mr. Pen, you know, if Randolph does not, that he is the heir, and his grandfather has a right to have him close at hand."

"It is no use arguing with women," said Randolph, white with rage. "I don't understand this nonsense about my father wanting him. I don't believe a word of it. But I tell you this, Mary, if he is the heir, I am his uncle, his next friend; and I say, he sha'n't lose his time here and get ruined among a pack of women. He must go to school. Supposing even that my father did want him (which is absolute absurdity; why, my father pretends not to know of his existence!) would you put a selfish old man's fancy against the boy's good?"

"Randolph! how do you dare, when he is so ill," cried Mary, with trembling lips, "to speak of my father so!"

"It is true enough anyhow," said the undutiful son. "When he is so ill! Why, that is the reason I can speak freely. One would not hurt his feelings if he could ever know it. But he was always known to be

selfish. I did not think there was any doubt about that. The boy must not be ruined for an old man's whim, even if it is true."

"It is dreadful to go against you," said the Vicar, looking at her with piteous eyes, beseeching her forgiveness; "but Randolph is in the right. Nello is losing his time; he is doing no good; he ought to go to school."

"You too!" cried Mary. She could not but smile, though the tears were in her eyes. And poor Mr. Pen's dissent from her cost the good man so much. He looked at her, his eyes too filling, with deprecating, beseeching, wistful looks, as a dog does. When he thus took part so distinctly against Mary, conscience, it was clear, must have been strong within Mr. Pen. He had tried hard for her sake to overcome the habit of irregular hours and desultory occupation which had grown upon him, and to give the children their lessons steadily, at the same hours, day by day. But poor Mr. Pen had not known how hard it would be to accomplish this. The idea of being able to make up the failing lessons at any odd moment which made the children at the Vicarage so uncertain in their hours, had soon returned after the first bracing up of duty towards Liliass and Nello had come to an end. And then Mrs. Pen had been ill, and could not bear the noise of the children; and then the Squire had been ill, upsetting everybody and everything; and then—the Vicar did not know what more to say for himself. He had got out of the way of teaching, out of the habit of exact hours, and Emily had been very poorly, and, on the whole, Randolph was right, and the boy ought to go to school.

Several of these discussions, however, took place before Mary gave way. The account Randolph had heard of the last scene in the library, before the Squire had his "stroke," had not been at all satisfactory to his mind. He sincerely believed (though with an uneasy sense of something in it that sounded like truth) that this story was a fabrication to suit a purpose. But, on the other hand, his own intentions were very distinct. The mere fact that such a story had been invented showed the meaning on the other side. This boy was to be foisted into the place which, for years, he had supposed himself to occupy. John not being possible, who but Randolph could fill that place? Another heir was ridiculous, was shameful, and a wrong to him. He would not suffer it. What right had John, an outlaw and exile, to have a son, if it came to that? He would not allow the child to stay here to be petted and pampered, and made to believe himself the heir. For, in the end, Randolph had made up his mind that the boy could not and should not be admitted to the advantages of heirship without a very different kind of proof of identity from any they possessed. And it would be ruin to the child to be allowed to fill such a false position now. The mere idea of it filled him with suppressed rage. He did not mean the boy any harm—not any real harm. On the contrary, it would be a real advantage to him in any case to be bred up frugally and industriously; and this he would insist upon, in spite of every resistance. He would not leave the child here to have him wormed into the old man's affections, made a tool of by Mary in John's interests, and to his own detriment. He was determined to get rid of Nello, whatever it cost him: not to do him harm,

but to get him out of the way. This idea began to possess him like a mania—to get rid of the child who was more dangerous, a great deal more dangerous, than John himself. And all the circumstances of the house favoured his removal at this moment, when the Squire's illness occupied everybody's attention. And then it was a great point to have enlisted on his side the reluctant and abashed, yet conscientious support of Mr. Pen.

As for the children themselves, a subtle discomfort had stolen into their life. The old gentleman's illness, though it did not affect them, affected the house. The severe and dangerous illness of an important member of any household has always a confusing influence upon domestic life. It changes the centre of existence, so that everything, which once radiated from the cheerful hearth becomes absorbed in the sick-chamber, making of it the temporary and fictitious centre of the dwelling. In this changed orbit, all the stars of the household firmament shine, and beyond it everything is left cold, and sunless, and neglected. Children are always the first to feel this atmospheric change, which affects them more than it does the watchers and nurses, whose time and minds are absorbed in the new occupation. It was as if the sun had gone out of the sky to the children at Penninghame. They were left free indeed, to go and come as they liked, nobody attempting to hustle them out of the way, to say, "Run, children, some one is coming." All the world might go and come, and it did not matter. Neither did it matter to them now where they went, for every room was equally dreary and empty. Mary, who meant home to them, and to whom they carried all their grievances

and pleasures, had disappeared from their view; and Miss Brown, who was their directress in minor matters, had become invisible too, swallowed up by that sick-room, which absorbed everything. It was no pleasure to roam about the drawing-room, generally forbidden ground, and even through and through the passages from the hall to the dining-room, though they had so often longed to do it, when nobody was to be found there, either to laugh with them, or to find fault. Even Eastwood was swept up in the same whirlpool; and as for Mary, their domestic divinity, all that was seen of her was when she passed from one room to another, crossing the corridor, disappearing within the door of the mysterious chamber, where doctors and nurses, and every sort of medicine, and drinks, and appliances of all kinds, were being taken. How could the old gentleman want so much? Twice over a new kind of bed was taken into that strange gulf of a sick-room, and all so silently—Eastwood standing on the stairs, deprecating with voice and gesture, “No noise, no noise!” That was what everybody said. Mary would smile at them when she met them, or wave her hand from the end of the corridor, or over the stairs. Sometimes she would pause and stoop down and kiss them, looking very pale and worn out. “No, dear, he is no better,” she would say. Except for these encounters, and the accounts which the servants gave them of their grandfather’s state,—how he was lying, just breathing, knowing nobody, not able to speak,—accounts which froze the children’s blood in their veins—they had no life at all; only dull meals which they ate under this shadow, and dull hours in which, having nothing to do, they huddled together, weary and lonely, and with no-

thing before them but to go to bed. Out of doors it was not much better. Mr. Penn had fallen into all the old disorder of his ways, out of which he had made a strenuous effort to wake for their benefit. He never was ready for them when they went with their lessons. "I will hear you to-morrow," he would say, looking at them with painful humility, feeling the grave countenance of Liliás more terrible than that of any judge; and when to-morrow came, there were always a hundred excuses. "Go on to the next page and learn the next lesson. I have had such a press of work—and Mrs. Pennithorne is so poorly," the poor man would say. All this shook the pillars of the earth to Liliás and Nello. They were shaken out of everything they knew, and left to blunder out their life as best they could, without any guide.

And this was hardest upon the one who understood it least. Liliás, whose mind was open to everything, and who sat looking out as from a door, making observations, keenly interested in all that went on, and at the same time with a reserve of imagination to fall back upon, was fully occupied at least if nothing more. Every day she watched for "Mr. Geoff" with news of her father. The suspense was too visionary to crush her with that sickening depression which affects elder minds. All had a softening vagueness and confusion to the child. She hoped and hoped, and cried with imaginative misery, then dried her eyes and hoped again. She thought everything would come right if Mr. Geoff would only bring papa; and Mr. Geoff's ability sooner or later to find and bring papa she never doubted. It was dreadful to have to wait so long—so long; but still every morning, any morning he might

come. This hope in her mind absorbed Liliás, and made her silent, indisposed for play. At other times she would talk eagerly, demanding her brother's interest and response to things he did not understand. Children can go on a long time without understanding, each carrying on his or her monologue, two separate streams, which, flowing tranquilly together, feel like something mutual, and answer all the ends of intercourse; and in this way neither of them was aware how far apart they were. But Nello was dull; he had so little to do. He had no pony, he could not play cricket as Johnny Pen did with the village boys. He was small, even for his age, and he had not been educated in the art of knocking about as English boys are. He was even a little timid of the water and the boats, in which other boys might have found solace. Half of his time he wandered about, listless, not knowing what to make of himself.

This was the condition of mind in which Randolph met him on one of these lingering afternoons. The child had strayed out all by himself; he was standing by the water-side at his old amusement, but not enjoying it this time. "What are you doing?" said his uncle, calling out to him as he approached. Randolph was not a favourite with the children; but it was half an amusement to see any one coming near, and to have to answer a question. He said "Nothing," with a sigh; not a single skip could he get out of those dull slates. The water would not carry them; they would not go; they went to the bottom with a prosaic splash and thud. How different from that day with the old gentleman, when they flew as if they had been alive! Perhaps this new comer might have luck, and

do as well as the old gentleman. "Will you have a try?" he said; "here is a good one—it ought to be a good one; but I can't make them go to-day."

"I—have a try?" Randolph was startled by the suggestion. But he was anxious to conciliate the little fellow whom he wanted so much to get rid of. And it was only for once. He took suspiciously (for he was always suspicious) the stone Nello held out to him, and looked at it as if it might be poison—or it might be an attempt on his dignity got up by somebody. When he had satisfied himself that it was a common piece of slate, he took courage, and, with a smile that sat very awkwardly upon his face, threw it, but with the most complete unsucccess.

"Ah! you are not good, like the old gentleman; his skipped seven times! He was so clever at it! I wish he was not ill," said Nello, checking an incipient yawn. It was, perhaps, the first time any one had uttered such a wish. It had been taken for granted, even by his daughter, that the Squire's illness was the most natural thing in the world.

"Did he really come and play with you? But old men are no better than children," said Randolph. "I suppose he had nothing else to do."

"It is very nice to have somebody to play with when you have nothing else to do," said Nello, reflectively. "And he was clever. You—you don't know even how to throw; you throw like a girl—like this. But this is how the old gentleman did," cried Nello, suiting the action to the word, "and so do I."

"Do you know nothing but these baby-games? I suppose you never played cricket?" said Randolph, with, though he was a man, a pleasurable sense of

being thus able to humiliate the little creature beside him. Nello coloured to the roots of his hair.

"I do not like cricket. Must every one like the same things? It is too hot; and one cannot play by oneself," the boy added with a sigh.

"You ought not to play by yourself, it is not good for you. Have you no one to play with, little boy?"

"Nobody," said Nello, with emphasis; "not one person. There is Lily; but what does it matter about a girl? And sometimes Johnny Pen comes. He is not much good; he likes the green best, and all the village boys. Then they say I am too little;—and I don't know them," the boy added with a gleam of moisture in his eyes. The village boys had not been kind to Nello; they had laughed at him for a little foreigner, and made remarks about his hair, which was cut straight across his forehead. "I don't want to know them." This was said with vehemence; for Nello was sore at the want of appreciation which had been shown him. They did not care for *him*, but they made a great deal of Johnny Pen!

"You should go to school; that is where all boys should go. A boy should not be brought up like a little girl; he should learn to use his hands, and his fists even. Now, what should you do if there was a fight?"

"A fight?" Nello grew pale and then grew red. "If it was—some one else, I would walk away; but if it was me—if any one touched me, I should kill him!" cried the child, setting his little white teeth.

Randolph ought professionally to have improved the occasion; but he only laughed—that insulting laugh which is offensive to everybody, and specially exaspe-

rates a child. "How could you kill him? That is easier said than done, my boy."

"I would get a gun, or a sword; but first," said Nello, calming down, "I would tell him to go away, because I should not *wish* to kill him. I have seen people fighting with guns and swords—have you?"

Here Randolph, being obliged to own himself inferior, fell back upon what was right, as he ought to have done before.

"Fighting is very wrong," he said. "It is dreadful to think of people cutting each other to pieces, like wild beasts; but it is not so bad if you defend yourself with your fists. Only foreigners fight with swords; it is thoroughly un-English. You should never fight; but you would have to defend yourself if you were at school."

Nello looked at his uncle with an agreeable sense of superiority. "But I have seen *real* fighting," he said; "not like children. I saw them fighting the Austrians—that was not wrong. Papa said so. It was to get back their houses and their country. I was little then, and I was frightened. But they won!" cried the boy, with a gleam in his dark eyes. What a little savage he was! Randolph was startled by the sudden reference to "papa," and this made him more warm and eager in his turn.

"Whoever has trained you to be a partisan has done very wrong," he said. "What do you know about it? But look here, my little man. I am going away on Friday, and you are to come with me. It will be a great deal better for you than growing up like a little girl here. You are exactly like a little girl now, with your long hair and your name which is a girl's

name. You would be Jack if you were at school. I want to make a man of you. You will never be anything but a little lady if you don't go to school. Come; you have only to put on a frock like your sister. Nelly! Why, that's a girl's name! You should be Jack if you were at school."

"I am not a girl!" cried Nello. His face grew crimson, and he darted his little brown fist—not so feebly as his size promised—in his uncle's face. Randolph took a step backwards in his surprise. "I hate you!" cried the child. "You shall never, never come here when I am a man. When the old gentleman is dead, and papa is dead, and everything is mine, I will shut up all the doors, I will turn out the dogs, and you shall never come here. I know now it is true what Lily says—you are the bad uncle that killed the babes in the wood. But when I am a big man and grown up, you shall never come here!"

"So!" said Randolph, furious but politic; "it is all to be yours? I did not know that. The castle, and the woods, and everything? How do you know it will be yours?"

"Oh! everybody knows that," said Nello, recovering his composure as lightly as he had lost it; "Martuccia and every one. But first the old gentleman must be dead, and, I think, papa. I am not so sure about papa. And do you think they would teach me cricket at school, and to fight? I don't really care for cricket, not really. But Johnny Pen and the rest, they think so much of it. I should like to knock down all their wickets, and get all the runs; that would teach them! and lick them after!" said the bloodthirsty Nello, with gleaming eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

An Apparition.

THUS Randolph overcame Nello's opposition to school, to his own extreme surprise. Though he had a child of his own, and all the experiences of a middle-aged clergyman, he had never yet learned the A B C of childhood. But it may be supposed that the conversation generally had not made him love his nephew more dearly. He shook his fist at the boy as he ran along the water-side, suddenly seized by the delight of the novelty and the thought of Johnny Pen's envy. "If I had you, my boy!" Randolph said, between his teeth, thinking grimly of the heirship which the child was so sure of. Pride would have a fall in this as in other cases. The child's pretensions would not count for very much where he was going. To be flogged out of all such nonsense would be far the best thing for him; and a good flogging never did a boy much harm. Randolph, though he was not a bad man, felt a certain gratification in thinking of the change that would occur in Nello's life. There was nothing wrong about the school; it was a very humble place, where farmers' sons were trained roughly but not unkindly. It would make a man of the delicate little half-foreign boy, who knew nothing about cricket. No doubt it would be different from anything he was used to; but what of that? It was the best thing for him. Randolph was not cruel, but still it gave him a

little pleasure to think how the impudent little wretch would be brought to his senses; no harm done to him—no *real* harm—but only such a practical lesson as would sweep all nonsense out of his head. If Nello had been a man of his own age, a rival, he could not have anticipated his humiliation with more zest. He would have liked to be a boy himself to fag the little upstart. There would be probably no fagging at the farmers' school, but there would be—well! he smiled to himself. Nello would not like it; but it would bring the little monkey to his senses, and for that good purpose there was no objection to be taken to the means.

And as he walked through the Chase, through the trees, seeing in the distance before him the blunt turret-chimneys, all veiled and dignified with ivy, of the old house, many thoughts were in Randolph's heart. He was a Musgrave, after all, if not a very fine example of the race. His wife was well off. If it had not been for John, who was a criminal, and this boy—what he would have done for the old place! What he might do still, if things went——well! Was that, perhaps, the word to use—well? That is, if John could be somehow disposed of, prevented from coming home, and the boy pushed quietly to one side. As for John, he could not come home. It would be death—perhaps; certainly renewed disgrace. He would have to stand his trial, and, if he fled from that trial once, how was he likely to be able to face it now? He would stay abroad, of course—the only safe place for him. If he could but be communicated with, wherever he was, and would send for his son and daughter, some arrangement might be made: a share

of the income settled upon him, and the family inheritance left for those who could enjoy it. This would be, in every way, the best thing that could be done; best for John himself; best for the house which had been always an honourable one, and never connected with disgrace. It is so easy to believe what one wishes that Randolph, after a while, going over the subject in his mind, succeeded in smoothing away all difficulties, except, indeed, the initial one of getting into correspondence, one way or another, with John. If this could be done, surely all the rest was smooth enough! John was not a fool; he must see that he could not come home. He must see how difficult it would be to prove his marriage and his son's birth, and make everything clear (though why this should be so difficult Randolph did not explain even to himself). Then he must see equally well that, to put the property and the old castle into the hands of a man with money, who could really do something to improve them, would be far better for the family than to go on as he (John) must do, having no money, if even he could come lawfully into possession. All this was so evident, no man in his senses could refuse to see it. And as for communicating with John: there was, of course, one way, which seemed the natural way, and which surely must be infallible in that case as in most other cases—the *Times*. However far out of the world John might be, surely he would have opportunities from year to year of seeing the *Times*! No Englishman, even though banished, could live without that. And, sooner or later, if often enough repeated, the advertisement must reach him. Suppose it to be put something in this form:—"J. M., of P.—

His brother R. wishes to communicate with him on urgent business connected with the death of their father." This would attract no particular attention from any one, and John could not fail to perceive that he was meant. Thus he had, to his satisfaction, made everything clear.

It was just when he came to this satisfactory settlement of the difficulty, so perfectly easy in theory, though no doubt there might be certain difficulties about carrying it out, that Randolph suddenly saw, a little way before him, some one making his way through the trees. The Chase was private, and very few people had the right of coming here; neither did Randolph see whence this unexpected passenger had come, for there was no tributary path by which he might have made his way down to the foot-walk through the elms and oaks. He was within easy sight, obscured a little by the brushwood, and with his back to the spectator; but the sight of him gave Randolph a great start and shock, which he could not very well explain. The man was in dark clothes, with a broad felt hat, quite unlike anything worn in this district; and there was something about his attitude and walk (no doubt a merely fantastic resemblance, or some impression on his mind from his pre-occupation with the idea of John) which recalled his brother to Randolph's mind. He was more startled than words could say. For a moment he could not even think or move, but stood open-mouthed, staring at the figure before him, which went on straight, not turning to the right or to the left.

When Randolph came to himself, he tried to laugh at his own folly—then coughed loudly and meaningly,

by way of catching the stranger's attention, and seeing who it was. But his cough attracted no manner of attention from the wayfarer, who went on pushing through the trees, like one who knew every turn and winding. Randolph was at the end of his invention. If he called out "Hi!" it might turn out to be somebody of importance. If he spoke more politely, and called the stranger to halt, he might be a nobody—if indeed it was not——. A vague impression, half of fear, came upon him. What nonsense it was! In broad daylight, in so well-known and familiar a place. Had it been in the dark, in any of the ghostly passages of the old house! but out here in the sunshine, in the open air!

Randolph took off his hat, to let the air blow freely about him, for he had grown hot and uncomfortable. His hand with the hat in it dropped for a moment between him and the other who was so near him. When he raised it again there was no one there. He rubbed his eyes, looked again, and darted forward to see whether the man was hiding among the trees; but there was no one there. Randolph took off his hat once more, to wipe his streaming forehead; his hand trembled so that he could scarcely do it. What did it mean? When he had convinced himself there was no one to be seen, he turned and hurried away from the place, with his heart beating loudly in his breast. He never looked behind him, but hastened on till he had got to the broad road, where there was not a bush to hide an apparition. Then he permitted himself to draw breath.

It would be doing Randolph injustice to suppose that after he was out of the shadow of the trees, and

in safety, with a broad level bit of road before him, on which everything was distinctly visible all round, he could be capable of believing that he had seen a ghost. Nothing of the kind. It must have been one of the people about the place, poking among the bushes, who had disappeared under the branches of the trees, and whom he thought like John only because he had been thinking of John—or perhaps his thought of John had produced an optical delusion, and imagination had painted some passing shadow as a substantial thing, and endued it with his brother's image. It might have been merely an eccentric tree, on the outline of which fancy had wrought, showing a kind of grotesque resemblance. It might be, and probably was, just nothing at all. And it was supremely ridiculous that his heart should so thump for such an absurd delusion; but thump it did, and that in the most violent manner. He was out of breath, though he had made no exertion. And he could not pick up his thoughts where he had dropped them, when he saw that—figure. A thrill as of guilt was in his soul; he was afraid to begin again where he had left off. He found himself still rather breathless before the house, looking up at the veiled windows of his father's room. For the first time Randolph thought with a little awe of his father lying there between life and death. He had not thought of him at all in his own person, but rather of the Squire officially, the old life who kept a younger generation out of the estate. It was time the elders were out of the way, and age superseded by middle age. But now for a moment he realized the man lying helpless there, in the very pathway of death—not freed by the Great Deliverer,

but imprisoned by Him, all his senses and faculties bound up, a captive tied hand and foot by the grim potency who conquers all men. Randolph was frightened altogether by the mysterious encounter and impressed with awe. If there had been daily service he would have gone to church, but as there was nothing of the sort in Penninghame, he went into the library to read a good book, as the next best thing to do. But he could not stay in the library. The silence of it was awful. He seemed to see his father, seated there in his usual chair, silent, gazing at him with eyes of disapproval that went through and through him. After five minutes he could stand it no longer. He took his good book, and went out to the side of the water, within sight of the road where people were coming and going. It was a comfort to him to see even the doctor's boy with his phials, and the footman who came with his mistress's card to inquire how the Squire was. And he looked out, but looked in vain, with mingled eagerness and fear for the broad hat he had seen so mysteriously appearing and disappearing. Who could it be?—some stranger astray in the Chase—some one of the many tourists who wander everywhere—or—Randolph shuddered in spite of himself.

It is generally people without imagination, or with the most elementary and rude embryo of that poetic faculty, who see ghosts. This sounds like a paradox, yet there is reason in it. The people who are literal and matter-of-fact in mind, are those to whom wonders and prodigies come naturally; those who possess the finer eye of fancy do not need those actual revelations. Randolph's was as stolid a mind as ever asked

for a sign—and he had not asked for a sign in this case, nor felt that anything of the kind was necessary; but his entire mental balance was upset by what he had seen, or supposed himself to have seen; and he could not free his mind from the impression. As he sat and read, or rather pretended to read, his mind kept busy with the one question—What was it? Was it a real person, a stranger who had got astray, and stumbled into some copse or brushwood, which Randolph had forgotten—a man with a chance resemblance to John, heightened by the pre-occupation and previous reference to John in Randolph's mind? or was it John himself, come to look after his own interests—John—in the body, or out of the body, who could tell?

As for Nello, he ran home by the water-side, his mind possessed by the new thing that was about to be accomplished—school! Boys to play with, novelty of all kinds, and then that cricket, which he pretended to despise, but secretly admired and desired with all his heart—the game which came to Johnny Pen by nature, but which the little foreign boy could not master; all this buzzed through his little head. When he came home from school he would know all about it; he would have played with much better players than Johnny Pen ever saw. The revolution in his thoughts was great and sudden. But as he ran home, eager to tell Liliás about the change in his fortunes, Nello too met with a little adventure. He came suddenly, just as he emerged from the woods upon the water-side where it was open to the road, on a man whom he had repeatedly seen before, and who was generally accompanied by a dog, which was Nello's

admiration. The dog was not with his master now; but he took a something white and furry out of his great pocket, which stopped Nello even in the hot current of his excitement.

"Would you like to have this, my little gentleman?" the man said.

It was a white rabbit, with the biggest ears that Nello had ever seen. How his eyes danced that had been all aglow before!

"But I have no money," he said, disposed to cry in disappointment as sudden as his delight.

"It's not for money, it's a present," said the stranger, with a smile. "and I'll give you another soon. They tell me you're going to school, my young gentleman; is that true?"

"Am I to have it all for myself, or will you come back again for it, and take it away? Oh yes, I'm going to school," said Nello, dropping into indifference, "Will it eat out of my hand? Has it got a name? And am I to have it all for myself?" The rabbit already had eclipsed school for the moment in Nello's mind.

"It's all for you, and better things than that—and what day are you going, my bonnie little lad?"

"To-morrow; oh give it me! I want to show it to Lily," cried the child. "Thank you very much. Let me run and show it to Lily. We never, never had a rabbit before."

The man stood and looked after Nello with a tender illumination of his dark face. "The old woman likes the other best; but this one is mine," he said to

himself. As for Nello, he flew home with his precious burden, out of breath. He said a man had given it to him; but thought of the donor no more.

Randolph spent this, his last evening at home, in anything but an agreeable way; he was altogether unhinged, nervous, and restless, not caring to sit alone. In this respect he was in harmony with the house, which was all upset, tremulous, and full of excitement and expectation. Human nature is always impatient of the slow progress of fate. After the thunderclap of a great event, it is painful to relapse into stillness, and feel the ordinary day resuming its power without any following out of the convulsion. But dramatic sequence, rapidity, and completeness are rare in human affairs. All the little crowd of lookers-on outside the Squire's room watched eagerly for some change. Two or three women were always hanging about the passages, ready, as they said, to run for anything that might be wanted, and always in the way to learn if anything occurred. They kept a little lamp burning on the table against the wall, at either end of which was a chair, on which sometimes Cook herself, sometimes lesser functionaries, would be found, but always two together, throwing exaggerated shadows on the wall, and talking in whispers of their own fears, and how well they had perceived what was coming. There was not one of them that had not intended, one time or other, to make so bold as to speak to Miss Mary. "But trouble is always soon enough when it comes," they said, shaking their heads. Then Eastwood would come and join them, his shadow wavering over the staircase. When the privileged persons who had the *entrée* went or came, Miss Brown or the nurse, or even

Mary herself, there was a little thrill and universal movement.

"Change! no, there's no change—there never will be but one change," Miss Brown said, standing solemnly by the table, with the light on her grave face; and it was upon this Rembrandtish group that Randolph came, as he wandered about in a similar frame of mind, glad to find himself in company with others, though these others were only the maids of the house.

"Is my father worse?" he asked, pausing, with his arm upon the bannisters. Such a group of eager, pale faces! and the darkness all round in which others still might be lurking unseen.

"No change, sir," said Miss Brown, shaking her head. She was impatient too, like the rest, but yet felt a sort of superior resignation, as one who was in the front of affairs. And she had something to say besides. She gave a glance at the other women, who responded with secret nods of encouragement, then cleared her throat and delivered her soul—"Mr. Randolph, sir, might I make so bold as to say a word?"

"Say whatever you like," said Randolph. He could not help but give a little glance round him, to make sure that there was no one else about.

"It is just this, sir—when you see him lying there, that white, as if he was gone already, and know that better he can't be—oh, it brings a many thoughts into the mind! I've stood by dying beds before now, and seen them as were marked for death, but I never saw it more clear. And oh, Mr. Randolph, if there were things that might lie on his mind, and keep him from

going quiet, as an old gentleman ought! If there were folks he ought to see afore all's over——!"

"I don't see what you are driving at," Randolph said, hastily. "Speak out, if you've anything to say."

"Oh, sir," said Miss Brown, "don't you think——. I am not one that likes to interfere, but I am an old servant, and when a body has been long about a place, it's natural to feel an interest. If it wasn't your family at all—if it was another that your advice was asked for—shouldn't you say that Mr. John ought to know?"

This appeal startled Randolph. He had not been looking for it; and he gave an uncomfortable look round him. Then he felt a strange irritation and indignation that were more easy to express. "Am I my brother's keeper?" he said. "I don't know where Mr. John is, that I should go and hunt for him to let him know."

"Oh, sir," said Miss Brown, "don't you be angry! Cook here is like me: she thinks it's only his due. I would say it to Miss Mary, not troubling you that are 'most a stranger, but she's night and day, she never will leave her father; she has a deal upon her. And a gentleman knows ways that womanfolk don't think of. If you would be but that kind, Mr. Randolph! Oh, where there's a will there's always a way!"

"It is none of my business," said Randolph; "and I don't know where he is," he added, looking round him once more. He might be here already in the dark, waiting till the breath was out of his father's body—waiting to seize possession of the house,

felon as he was. And if Randolph was the means of betraying him into the hands of justice, what would everybody say? He went abruptly away down the uncarpeted, polished stairs, on which his hasty step rang and slid. John, always John! he seemed to be in the air. Even Eastwood, when he attended him with his bed-candle, could not refrain from adding a word. "The doctor looks very serious, sir," Eastwood said; "and if there's any telegraph to be sent, I'll keep the groom ready to go at a moment's notice. 'It would be well to send for all friends,' the doctor said."

"I don't know any one to send for," said Randolph peremptorily; "let the groom go to bed." And he went to bed himself sooner than usual, to get rid of these appeals and of equally imperative thoughts. He went to bed, but he could not go to sleep, and kept his candle burning half the night. He heard the watchers moving about in his father's room, which was over-head, all the night through. Sometimes there would be a little rush of steps, and then he held his breath, thinking this might be at last the "change" which was looked for. But then everything grew still again, and he dozed, with the one poor candle, feeble but steadfast watcher, burning on till it became a pale intruder into the full glory of day.

Randolph, however, slept deeply in the morning, and got up with the greater part of those cobwebs blown away. John lost his hold upon the imagination in daylight, and he was able to laugh at his foolish alarm. How could it be John whom he had seen? He durst not show himself in the country where still his crime was so well remembered, and the sentence

out against him. And as for the appearance being anything more than mortal, or less than human, Randolph laughed at the state of his own nerves which rendered such an idea tenable for a moment. He was a materialist by nature—as so many are; though he said his creed without any intrusive doubts; and the absurdity was too patent after he had slept and been refreshed. But no doubt it was bad for his health, bad for his *morale*, to stay here. There was something in the atmosphere that was demoralizing; the air had a creeping sensation in it as of something more than met the eye. Death was in it; death, creeping on slowly, silently—loitering about with faint odours of mortality and sickening stillness. Randolph felt that he must escape into a more natural and wholesome air before further harm was done.

As for Mary, the occupations of the sick-room, and the sudden problems of the hereafter thus thrust upon her, were enough to fill her mind, and make her even comparatively indifferent to the departure of Nello, though it was against her judgment. It was not the hereafter of the spirit, which thus lay death-bound on the verge of the unseen, which occupied her. We must all die, everybody knows; but who thinks it true in their own case until it comes? Mary had known very well that a man much over seventy could not live very much longer; but it was only when her father fell back in his chair unconscious, his body motionless, his mind veiled within blinding mists, that she felt the real weight of all that was to follow. It was for her to act as soon as the breath should be out of his body. She did not trust her younger brother, and she did not know what to do for her elder brother. The

crisis had arrived while she was still unprepared. She went down mechanically to see Randolph go away, her eyes seeing many other things more clearly than she saw the two figures actually before her; the man suspicious as usual, and putting no faith in her—the boy in a subdued excitement, his eyes sparkling with the light of novelty and adventure. Randolph had gone into his father's room that morning, and had walked suspiciously round the bed, making quite sure that the "no change" was true. "I suppose he may last like this for weeks yet?" he said, in a querulous undertone—and yet not so low but that everybody heard it—to the doctor. "Oh, hush, for Heaven's sake, Randolph! How can you tell that he does not hear?" said Mary. "Pshaw! how can he hear?" Randolph replied, turning with a certain contempt from the helpless and powerless frame which lay there making no sign, yet living when it would be so much better that he should die. The awe of such a presence gives way to familiarity and weariness even with the most reverent watcher; but Randolph, though he had no desire to be indecorous, could not help feeling a certain irritation at his father, who balked him by this insensibility just as he had balked him while yet he had all his wits about him. It seemed incredible that this half-dead, half-living condition, which brought everything to a standstill, should not be more or less a man's own fault.

Thus he went away, irritated and baffled, but still full of excitement; the moment which must decide all could not be very far off. He left the strongest charges upon the household, from his sister to Eastwood, to send for him instantly when "any change"

occurred. "If it should be to-morrow," he said; "I shall hold myself always ready." He kept his eyes fixed on the Castle as long as he could see it, feeling that even now there might be a sign recalling him. And he thought he had made up his mind what to do. He would bring his wife with him and take possession at once. Mary would not be able to look after everything; or, at least, if she should be, she ought not to be; no really delicate-minded woman, no *lady* should be able to make any exertion at such a moment. He would come with his household, as a kindness to Mary, and take possession at once.

As for Nello, he took leave very cavalierly of Liliás, who cried, yet would not cry, angry at his desertion and deeply wounded by his indifference, at the door. Poor little Liliás, it was her first disappointment in life. He was not thinking of her, but a great deal of his new portmanteau and the sandwiches put up for him; and the important position as a traveller in which he stood—but neither was Nello unkind. He took pains to console his sister.

"Don't cry," he said, "Lily; I shall come back in the holidays, and sometimes I will write you letters; and there is always the white rabbit I gave you, and little Mary Pen for you to play with."

"I don't want to play," said Liliás, with a burst of tears; "is play everything? I am too old for that. But oh, Nello, you are going to leave me, and you don't care. You do not care for Mary, or Martuccia, or any one. Me, I should not mind—but you do not love *any one*. You care for nobody but yourself."

"Oh yes I do," said Nello, "everybody," and he cracked the coachman's whip which was placed in

readiness; "but boys have to go out and see the world; Eastwood says so. If I don't like being at school I shall come back and stay at home, and then you will have me again; but I hope not, and I don't think so, for school is jolly, very jolly, so Uncle Randolph says."

"You can go with Uncle Randolph," cried Lillas, in a blaze of sharp anger, "and I hope you will not come back. I hope you will always stay away, you cruel, cruel boy!"

This bewildered Nello for a moment, as did the hurried wiping of Lillas' eyes and the tremulous quiver of her lip with which it was accompanied; but there was no time for more. He laughed and waved his hand to her as he was hurried into the carriage. He had scarcely ever looked so gay before. He took off his hat and waved it as he went out of sight. Hurrah! they heard his shrill little voice shouting. Lillas sat down on the ground and cried her heart out. It was not only that he was unkind—but Nello thus showed himself wanting to all the needs of the situation. No little hero of a story had ever gone away without a tribute to the misery of parting. This thought contracted her heart with a visionary pang more exquisite than the real. Nello was no hero, nothing but a little cruel, common, vulgar boy, not fit to put into any story, to go away so.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Loves of the Angels.

WHILE these events were going on at the Castle, Lord Stanton, for his part, had come to a standstill in the matter which he had been drawn into so inadvertently, and which had become so very serious an occupation in his life. He was young, and unacquainted with the ways of the world, and he did not know what step to take next. And he too was paralyzed by the sudden catastrophe which had happened to the Squire. Was it his fault? He could scarcely help an uneasy sense that by agitating him unduly he had helped to bring on the sudden attack, and thus he had left the Castle that evening with a heavy burden on his mind. And Geoff, with entire unconsciousness of the lingering pangs of life and the tenacity of the human frame, believed, without any doubt, that Mr. Musgrave would die, and did not know what was to be done about the exile, whose condition would thus be completely changed. In the meantime it seemed to him necessary to wait until the issue of this illness should be known. Thus his doubtfulness was supplanted by an apparent necessity, and the time went on with nothing done.

He went at first daily to inquire for the old man, and never failed to see Lillas somewhere waiting for him with serious, intent face, and eyes which questioned even when the lips did not speak. Lillas did

not say much at any time. She examined his face with her eyes and said "Papa?" with a voice which trembled; but it became by degrees less easy to satisfy Lillas by telling her, as he did so often, that he had not forgotten, that he was doing everything that could be done, smoothing the way for her father's return, or waiting till he could more successfully smooth the way. "You do not believe me, Lily," Geoff said, with a sense of being doubted, which hurt him sadly. "Yes; but he is not your papa, Mr. Geoff, and you are grown up and don't want any one," Lillas said, with her lip quivering. The visionary child was deeply cast down by the condition of the house and the recollection of the melancholy rigid figure which she had seen carried past, with a pang of indescribable pain and terror. Lillas seemed to see him lying in his room, where Mary now spent almost all her time, pale with that deadly ashen paleness, his faded eyes half open, his helpless hands lying like bits of rag, all the grey fingers huddled together. Fright and sorrow together brought a sob out of her heart whenever she thought of this; not moving, not able to speak, or turn round, or look up at those who watched him; and still not dead! Lillas felt her heart stand still as she thought of her grandfather. And she had no one to take refuge with. Martuccia was frightened too, and would not go up or down stairs alone. Lillas, for her part, did all she could, out of pride, and shame of her own weakness, to conceal her terror; but oh, to have papa nigh to creep close to, to feel safe because he was there! A few tears dropped from her eyes. "You are grown up and you don't want any one." This went to Geoff's heart.

"Oh Lily, don't you think they would let you come to my mother?" he cried; "this is too sad for you, this dismal house; and if Nello goes away as you said——"

"Do you think I would go and leave Mary all alone? Nobody is sorry for Mary except me—and Mr. Pen. When she comes out of her room I go and I kiss her hand, and she cries. She would be more ill and more weary," said Liliias, with a precocious understanding, "if there was not some little thing to give her an excuse and make her cry."

"My little Lily! who taught you all that? it must have been the angels," cried Geoff, kissing in his turn the little hand.

But this touch had the same effect upon Liliias that her own kiss had on Mary. She cried and sobbed and did her best to swallow it down. "Oh, Mr. Geoff! I want papa!" she cried, with that little convulsive break in her voice which is so pitiful in a child. She was seated on Mary's chair at the door of the hall, and he on the threshold at her feet. Geoff did not know what kind of half-admiring, half-pitying sentiment he had for this child. He could not admire her enough, or wonder at her. She was but a child, not equal to him in his young manhood; and yet that very childhood in its unconsciousness was worlds above him, he thought. He felt like the man in the story who loved the fairy maiden—the young Immortal; would she give up her visionary paradise for his sake and learn to look at him, not as an angel but as a woman? but for that she must be a woman first, and at present she was but a child. When he kissed her hand it cost Liliias no blush. She accepted it with

childish, angelical dignity. "She took the kiss sedately —"and the dark fountains of her eyes filled full, and two great tears tumbled over, and a piteous quiver came to her lips, and she said, "Oh, Mr. Geoff, I want papa!"

This was when the Squire had been ill about a week, six or seven days before Randolph took Nello away. Geoff went home riding, very full of thought. What could he do to please his little Lily? He preferred that she should creep close to himself and tell him her troubles, but he could not resist that plaint, and even though it should be against himself he must try what he could do to bring her father to her. Geoff thought a great deal on this subject, but it was very fatiguing and unsatisfactory, for he did not know what to do, and after a while he relapsed into the pleasanter path, and began to think of Lily. "Because of the angels," he said to himself as he jogged softly along, much more slowly and reflectively than his horse liked to go. He forgot where he was going and the engagements he had, and everything that was practical and important, as he rambled on. The day was sweet in early autumn, the lake rippling musically upon the beach, the sky blue and crossed by floating atoms of snowy cloud. Everything in the world was sweet and pleasant to the young man. "Because of the angels;" he had never been quite clear what these words meant, but he seemed to see quite plainly now, though he could no more have explained than he could have written *Hamlet*. "Because of the angels!" He seemed to make a little song of it as he went on, a drowsy, delicious burden like the humming of the bee. It was not he that said it, he thought, but it murmured all

about him, wrapping him in a soft enchantment. Such a visionary love as his, perhaps, has need of those intoxications of ethereal fancy: for nothing can be so like the love of an angel as that of a young man possessed by a tender visionary passion for a child.

Geoff was so rapt in his own thoughts that he did not see for some time the beckonings and signals that were coming to him from a carriage drawn up on the road to which the path descended, along which he was moving so gently. When his attention was at last caught, he saw it was his Cousin Mary, leaning half out of the window in her eagerness.

"Give your horse to the footman and come in here—I have so much to say to you," she said.

But when he had done as she told him and taken his seat beside her, Lady Stanton kept looking at her young cousin.

"What is it?" she said; "you keep on smiling, and there is a little drowsy, dreamy, intoxicated air about you; what has happened, Geoff?"

"Nothing; and it is unkind to say I look intoxicated. Could you not find a prettier word?"

"I believe you are really, really!—Geoff, I think I know what it means, and I hope it is some body very nice. Tell me, who is she?"

"This is strange," said Geoff; "indeed, it is true, I have been visiting a lady; but she is only twelve years old," he said, turning to her with a vivid blush.

"Oh, Geoff!" Mary's brow contracted, "you do not mean *that* little girl?"

"Why shouldn't I mean her? I will make you my confessor, Cousin Mary. I don't think I shall ever marry any one but little Lily. Of course she is very

little, and when she is grown up she will probably have nothing to say to me; but I shall never care for any one else. Why should you shake your head? I never saw any one like her," said Geoff, growing solemn, and shaking off his blush as he saw himself opposed.

"Oh, Geoff!" Mary shook her head and contracted her beautiful brow, "I do not think anything good can come out of that family; but I must not speak. I am jealous, I suppose. How did you know I did not want you for Annie or Fanny?" she went on with a smile that was a little strained and fictitious; for Mary knew very well that she was jealous, but not for Annie, or Fanny, or of Geoff.

"Hush," he said, "I loved you before Lily, but you could not have me; it is Lily, failing you. If you could but have seen her just now! The Squire is lying between life and death, and Miss Musgrave, who was so good to her, is with him night and day, and poor little Lily is so lonely and frightened. She looks at me with her little lip all quivering, and says, 'Papa! I want papa.'" Geoff almost cried himself to recollect her piteous tone, and the tears came to Mary's eyes.

"Ah! if she takes after *him*, Geoff! but that is just what I want to talk to you about. I have done something that you may think rash. I have spoken to Sir Henry. He is—well, he has his faults like the rest of us—but he is just; he would not do a wrong thing. I told him that you had found out something——"

"What did he say?" cried Geoff, breathless, for Lady Stanton made a sudden pause.

She was looking across him out at the window; he

eyes had strayed past his face, looking away from him as people do with a natural artifice to allow the first signs of displeasure to blow over, before they look an offended person in the face. But as she looked, Lady Stanton's countenance changed, her lips fell apart, her eyes widened out, her face paled, as if a cloud had passed over it. She gave a great cry, "Oh John, *John!*" she said.

"What is it?"—who is it?" cried Geoff.

She made him signs to have the carriage stopped; she could not speak. Geoff did what he could to make the coachman hear him; but it was by no means the affair of a moment to gain the attention of that functionary, and induce him to stop. When, however, this was accomplished, Geoff obeyed the passionate desire in Lady Stanton's face, who all the time had been straining to look out, and jumped to the ground. He looked round anxiously, while she, half out of the carriage, gazed back, fixing her eyes upon one of those recesses in the road which are common in the north country. "I see no one," said Geoff. He came back to the place on which her gaze was fixed, and looked behind the wall that bounded it, and all about, but could see nothing. When he returned, he found that Mary had fallen back in her corner, and was weeping bitterly. "He looked at me with such reproachful eyes. Oh, he need not; there was no reason. I would have saved or served him with my life," she cried; "and he had never any claim on me, Geoff, never any claim on me!—why should he come and look at me with such reproachful eyes? If he is dead, he ought to know better than that. Surely he ought to know——"

The carriage, standing in the middle of the road,

the young man searching about, not knowing what he was looking for; the coachman superbly indifferent on the box, contemplating the agitation of his inferiors with god-like calm; the footman, on Geoff's horse, with his mouth open, staring, while the beautiful lady wept inside, made the strangest picture. As a matter of course, the footman, riding on in advance, had seen nothing and nobody. He avowed frankly that he was not taking any notice of the folks on the road. He might have seen a man seated on the stones, he could not be certain. Neither had the coachman taken any notice. Foot passengers did not interest either of these functionaries. And Lady Stanton did not seem able to give any further explanation. The only thing to be done was to go on. She had been on her way to Stanton to give Geoff the advantage of Sir Henry's advice and opinion, and thither, accordingly, they proceeded after this interruption. Geoff took his place again beside his cousin, perhaps a little impatient of the stoppage; but as she lay back in the corner, covering her face with her hands, Geoff's heart was too soft not to forget every other sentiment. He thought only of consoling her.

"Tell me what it was," he said, soothingly. "You saw—some one? Do not cry so bitterly. You never harmed anybody in your life. Tell me—you thought you saw——?"

"I saw *him*, as plainly as I see you, Geoff; don't tell me it was a fancy. He was sitting, resting, like a man tired with walking, dusty and worn out. I noticed his weary look before I saw his face, and just as we passed he raised his head. Oh, why should he have looked at *me* like that, Geoff? No, I never did any one

harm, much less him. I have always stood up for him, you know, since you first spoke to me. I have always said, always—even before this was found out: living people mistake each other continually; but the dead—the dead ought to know——”

“Who is dead?” said Geoff; “are you speaking of John Musgrave, who is as much alive as I am?”

“If he were a living man,” said Mary, solemnly, “how could I have seen him? Geoff, it is no mistake. I saw him, as I see you.”

“And is that why you think him dead?” said Geoff, with natural surprise.

Lady Stanton raised herself erect in her corner. “Geoff, oh, can you not understand?” she cried. But she did not herself quite understand what she meant. She thought from the suddenness of it, from the shock it gave her, and from the disappearance of the wayfarer, which was so inexplicable, that it was an apparition she had seen. John Musgrave could not be there, in the flesh, seated by the roadside; it was not possible; but when Geoff asked whether having seen him was an argument for thinking him dead, she had nothing to say. She wrung her hands. “I have seen him whether he is living or dead,” she repeated, “and he looked at me with such eyes. He was not young as he used to be, but worn, and a little grey. I came to tell you what Sir Henry said; but here is something far, far more important. Know him! Could I mistake him, do you think?—how could I mistake him? Geoff, how could it be *he*, sitting there without any warning, without a word? but if it was he, if that was possible, why are we going on like this? Are we to desert him?

—give him up? I am talking folly,” she said, again clasping her hands. “Oh, Geoff, a living man would not have looked at me with such eyes.”

“He has not very much right to happy eyes, has he?” said Geoff; “coming home an outlaw, not venturing to speak to any one. It would not be half so sad if he were a ghost. But to come back, and not to dare to trust even his friends, not to know if he has any friends, not to be able to go home and see his children like any other man, to rest on the stones at the roadside, he to whom all the land belongs! I don’t wonder he looked sad,” cried Geoff, half-sympathetic, half-indignant. “How was he to know even that he would find a friend in you?”

Mary was sobbing, scarcely able to speak. “Oh, tell them to go back again—tell them to go back,” she cried. There was no way of satisfying her but this: the carriage turned slowly round, rolling like a ship at sea. The coachman was disgusted and unwilling. “What did she want now?” he said, telegraphing with uplifted hands and eyes to the surprised footman on Geoff’s horse. Lady Stanton was not a hard mistress like her stepdaughters, nor fantastical and unreasonable as they were. She took the carriage humbly when she could get it, and would consult this very coachman’s convenience before bringing him out, which no one else thought of doing. Nevertheless Lady Stanton had her character in the house, and human nature required that it should be kept up. She was the stepmother, the scapegoat. “What is she after now?” the coachman said.

She got out of the carriage herself, trembling, to aid in the search, and the footman getting down, looked

everywhere, even under the stones, and in the roadside hedges, but no one was there. When they resumed their way again, Mary lay back in her corner too much worn out with excitement and emotion to be able even to speak. Geoff could not tell whether she was glad or sorry to be brought to acknowledge that it was more likely to be John Musgrave whom she had seen than his ghost. She was convinced by his reasoning. Oh, yes; no doubt, she said, it must be so. Because you saw a man unexpectedly, that was no reason for supposing him to be dead. Oh, no—Geoff was quite right; she saw the reason of all he said. But Mary's head and her heart and all her being thrilled with the shock. There was a ringing in her ears, and pulses were beating all over, and her blood coursing through her veins. The very country, so familiar, seemed to change its aspect. No stronger commentary could have been on the passage of time than the sudden glimpse of the face which she had seen just now on the roadside. But Mary did not think of that. The lake and the rural road that ran by it, and the hills in the distance, seemed to take again the colours of her youth. He was nothing to her, and never had been. She had not loved him, only had "taken an interest." But all that was most poignant in her life came back to her, with the knowledge that he was here. Once more it seemed to be that time when all is vivid, when every day may be the turning-point of life—the time that was consciously but a drift and floating on of hour by hour when it existed, as is the present moment—but which, looking back upon it, seemed the time of free action, of choice, of every possibility. Was it so? Might he be met with round any corner—this man who had

been banished so long? In the face of death and danger had he come back, he whom nobody had expected ever to come back? A strange half-question whether everything else had come back with him, and half-certainty that nothing for her could change, was in Mary's mind as she lay back, quivering with emotion, hearing Geoff's voice in her ears, not knowing a word he said. What had Geoff to do with it— young Geoff, to whom nothing had ever happened? She smiled vaguely to herself to think that the boy could think he knew. How was he to know?—he was not of that time. But all the people in the road, and the very water itself, and the villages and houses, seemed to ask her, Was it true?

This was all the evidence on the subject from which a judgment could be formed. Randolph Musgrave (who told no one) had seen, in his own words, a something, a some one, whose face he did not see, but who suggested John to him so strongly that his very heart seemed to stop beating—then disappeared. And Lady Stanton from the window of the carriage, driving past, saw a face, which was John Musgrave's face grown older and worn, with hair that was slightly grey, instead of the brown curls of former years, and which disappeared too in the twinkling of an eye, and being searched for, could be found no more. What was it?—an apparition conjured up by their interest or their fears? or John Musgrave, in his own person, come home?

CHAPTER IX.

Nello's Journey.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE drove from the door of his father's house with a sigh of relief, yet of anxiety. He had not done what he meant to do, and affairs were more critical than when he went to Penninghame a few weeks before; but it was something at least to be out of the troubled atmosphere, and he had arranged in his own mind what he should do, which was in its way a gain, as soon as the breath was out of the old man's body—but when would that be? It was not to be desired, Randolph said to himself piously, that his father should linger long; his life was neither of use nor comfort to any one, and no pleasure, no advantage to himself. To lie there speechless, motionless, as much shut out of all human intercourse as if he were already in his coffin—what could any one desire but that, as soon as might be, it should come to an end?

He did not pay very much attention to his small companion. The little boy having been thus secured and brought within his power, had no further importance, and Randolph sat with knitted brows pondering all he was to do, without any particular reference to the child. Nello had left the Castle easily enough; he had parted from Mary and from Lillas without any lingering of emotion, getting over it as quickly as possible. When it came to that he was eager to be off, to set out into the world. The little

fellow's veins were full of excitement; he expected to see, he did not know what wonderful things, what objects of entrancing interest, as soon as he got outside the little region where everything was known to him. "Good-bye, Mary—good-bye, Lily," he said, waving his hand. He had his own little portmanteau with his name on it, a new little silver watch in his pocket—what could child want more? Lily, though she was his sister, was not a sensation like that watch. He took it out, and turned it round and round, and opened the case, and wound it up—he had wound it up twice this morning already, so that one turn of the key was all that was practicable. Nothing at the Castle, nothing in the society of Lily, was equal to this. He compared his watch with the clock at the druggist's in the village and found it fast: he compared it with the clock at the station and found that slow. He did not take any notice of his uncle, nor his uncle of him; each was indifferent, though partly hostile, to the other. Randolph was at his ease because he had this child, this troublesome atom, who might do harm though he could do no good, in his power; but Nello was at his ease through pure indifference. He was not at the moment frightened of his uncle, and no other sentiment in regard to him had been developed in his mind. As calm as if Randolph had been a cabbage, Nello sat by his side and looked at his watch. The watch excited him, but his uncle——. Thus they went on, an unsympathetic pair. Nello stood about on the platform and looked at everything, while Randolph took the tickets. He was slightly hurt to hear that a half-ticket was still enough for himself, and moved away at once to the other side of the station,

where the locomotive enthralled him. He stood and gazed at it with transport. What he would have given to have travelled there with the man who drove it, and left Uncle Randolph behind! But still Nello took his place in the train with much indifference to Uncle Randolph. He was wholly occupied with what was going on before and about him: the rush across country, trees and fields flying by, and the stations where there was always something new, the groups of people standing about, the rush of some for the train, the late arrival just as the doors were shut of those who were too late. These last made Nello laugh, their blank looks were so funny—and yet he was sorry for them; for what a thing it must be, he thought, to see other people go rushing out over the world to see everything, while you yourself were left dull at home! He remembered once himself being left with Martuccia in the still, deserted house when all the others had gone to the *festa*; how he thought the day would never end—and Martuccia thought so too. This made him sorry, very sorry, for the people who had lost their train. It did not occur to Nello that it might be no *festa* he was going to, or they were going to. What could any one want more than the journey itself? If you wearied of seeing the trains rush past, and counting the houses, now on one side, now on another, there was the endless pleasure of dashing up to one station after another, where Nello could look down with fine superiority on the people who were not going, on the children above all, who looked up envious, and envied him, he felt sure.

By and by, however, though he would not confess it to himself, the delights of the journey began to pall:

his little eyes grew fatigued with looking, and his little mind with the continuous spectacle of those long, flying breadths of country; and even the stations lost their charm. He would have liked to have somebody to talk to, and cast one or two wistful glances to see whether Uncle Randolph was practicable, but found no encouragement in that countenance, pre-occupied, and somewhat lowering by nature, which appeared now and then in the wavering of the train, over the newspaper his uncle was reading. What a long time it took to read that paper! How it crackled when it was opened out! How tired Nello grew of seeing it opposite to him! And he began to grow cramped with sitting; his limbs wanted stretching, his mind wanted change; and he began to be hungry. Randolph, who scorned the poor refreshments of the railway, and thought it better to wait for his meal till he reached home, did not think of the difference between himself and the child. They travelled on and on through the dulness of the afternoon. Nello, who had been so excited, felt disposed to sleep, but was too proud to yield to it; and then he began to think of his sister and the home he had left. It is natural, it is selfish, to remember home when we miss its comforts: but if that is not of the higher nature of love, it is yet the religion of the weak, and not despised by the great Succourer who bids men call upon Him in time of trouble. Nello's heart, when he began to feel tired and famished, recurred, with a pathetic trust in the tenderness and in the certainty of the well-being that abode there, to his home.

When they stopped at a lively, bustling junction to change their direction, things mended a little. Nello

ventured to buy himself a cake, his uncle not interfering, as they waited. "You will spoil your stomach with that sweet stuff," Randolph said, but he allowed the child to munch. And they had half-an-hour to wait, which of itself was something. Nello walked about, imitating Randolph's longer stride, though he did not accompany his uncle; and though he felt forlorn and very small among the crowd, marched about and looked at everything as the gentlemen did, recovering his spirits a little. And suddenly, with a great glow of pleasure all over him, Nello spied, among the strangers who were hurrying to and fro, a face he had seen before; it is true it was only the face of the countryman who had accosted him in the Chase, and with whom he had but a small acquaintance, but even this was something in the waste of the unknown that surrounded him. The boy rushed up to him with a gleam of joy upon his small countenance. "I say, have you come from—home?"

"Yes, my little gentleman," said Wild Bampfylde. "I'm taking a journey like you, but I like best to tramp on my two legs. I'm going no further in your carriages, that give you the cramp. I reckon you're tired too."

"A little," said Nello; "but that's no matter. What have you in your basket?—is it another rabbit? I gave mine to Lily. They would not let me bring it, though I wanted to bring it. School you know," said the boy, seriously, "is not like home. You have to be just like as if you were grown up there. Little—you cannot help being little; but you have to be like as if you were grown up there."

"Ay, ay, that's the way to take it," said the countryman, looking down with a twinkle in his eye, half smiling, half sad, at the small creature beside him. "The thing is to be a man, and to mind that you must stand up like a man, whatever happens. If one hits you, you must hit him again, and be sure not to cry."

"Hit me!" said Nello—"cry? Ah, you do not know the kind of school I am going to—for you are not a gentleman," he added, looking with superb condescension at his adviser. "I like you just the same," said Nello, "but you are not a gentleman, are you? and how can you know?"

"The Lord forbid!" said Bampfylde, "one's enough in a family. It would be ill for us, and maybe for you too, if I were a gentleman. Look you here, my little man. Look at the bonnie bird in this basket—it's better than your rabbit. A rabbit, though it's one o' God's harmless creatures, has little sense, and cannot learn; but this bonnie thing is of use to God and man, as well as being bonnie to look at. Look at him! what a bonnie head he has, and an eye as meaning as your own."

"A pigeon!" said Nello, with a cry of delight. "Oh, I wish I might have him! Do you think I might have him? I could put him under the seat, and nobody would see the basket; and then when we got there——"

"Ay, that's the question—when you got there?"

"I would say—it was my—fishing-basket," said Nello. "*He* said they went fishing; and nobody would know. I would say Mary had—put things in it; nobody would ever find out, and I would keep it in my room, and buy seed for it and give it water, and it would

live quite comfortable. And it would soon come to know me, wouldn't it? and hop about and sit on my shoulder. Oh, let me have it; won't you let me have it? Look here, I have a great deal of money," cried Nello, turning out his pocket; "five shillings to spend, and a sovereign Mary gave me. I will give you money for it, as much money as ever you please——"

"Whisht, my little lad; put back your money and keep it safe, for you'll have need of it. I brought the bird to give you. If they're kind folks they'll let you keep him. You must keep him safe, and take care he has his meat every day; and if they're unkind to you or treat you bad, put you his basket in the window and open the lid, and, puff! he'll flee away and let your friends know."

"But I should not like him to flee away. I would like him to stay with me always, and sit on my shoulder, and eat out of my hand."

"My little gentleman," said Bampfylde, "I'm afraid your uncle will hear us. Try to understand. If you're ill-used, if they're unkind, let the bird fly, and he'll come and tell us. Mind now, what I'm saying. He'll come and tell us. Did you never read in your story-books——"

"Then it is an enchanted bird," said Nello, looking down, very gravely, into the basket. Lily had read to him of such things. He was not very much surprised: but a bird that some day would turn into a young prince did not attract him so much as one that would hop on his shoulder without ulterior object. He looked down at it very seriously, with more respect perhaps, but not so warm an interest. His little face had lost its animation. How Lily would have glowed and

brightened at the thought! But Nello was no idealist. He preferred a real pigeon to all the enchanted princes in the world.

"Nay," said Bampfylde, with a gleam of a smile across his dark face, "it's no fairy, but it's a carrier. Did you never hear of that? And when you let it fly it will fly to me, and let me know that you are wanting something—that they're not kind to you, or that you're wanting to be away."

"Oh, they'll be kind," said Nello, carelessly; "I would rather he would stay with me, and never, never fly away."

"I'll put him in the carriage for you," said Bampfylde, hurriedly, "for here's somebody coming. And don't you let any one know that you were speaking to me, or ever saw me before. And God bless you, my little gentleman!" said the vagrant, suddenly disappearing among the crowd.

While Nello stood staring after him, Randolph came up, and tapped him sharply on the shoulder.

"What are you staring at? Have you seen any one you know?"

It was Nello's first lesson in deceiving.

"I—I was looking at a man—with wild beasts," he said.

"With wild beasts!—in the station?—here?"

"Yes, white rabbits and pigeons—and things; at least," said Nello to himself, "he once had a white rabbit, if he hasn't got one now."

"Rabbits!" said Randolph. "Come along, here is our train. It is late; and before I have got you settled, and got back here again, and am able to think of myself, it will be midnight, I believe. You children don't

know what a trouble you are. I shall have lost my day looking after you. I should have been at home now but for you; and little gratitude I am likely to get, when all is done."

This moved Nello's spirit, for of all things in the world there is nothing that so excites opposition among great and little, as a claim upon our gratitude. Anything and everything else the mind may concede, but even a child kicks against this demand. Nello's feelings towards his uncle were not unkind; but, little as he was, instinct woke in him an immediate resistance.

"It was not me that did it," he said; "it was you. I should have stayed at home, and when the old gentleman is better he would have come out and played with me. And Mary would have let me stay. I like home," said Nello, "and perhaps I shall not like school; but if I don't like it," he added, brightening and forgetting the secret he had been so sworn to keep, "I know how to get away."

"How shall you get away?" said Randolph. But he was so sure of this matter, which was in his own hands, that he did not wait for any answer. "They will take care of that at school," he said; "and it will be the worse for you, my boy, if you make yourself disagreeable. Come along, or we shall miss the train."

Nello saw that the basket had been placed under his seat as he got in; and as the train swept away from the station, he caught a glimpse of the lonely figure of his new friend, standing among the little crowd that watched the departure. Bampfylde made a warning gesture to the child, who, forgetful of precaution, nodded and waved his hand in reply.

"Who is that?" cried Randolph, suspiciously, getting up to cast a searching look behind.

"Oh, it is the man with the wild beasts," Nello said.

And then came another silent sweep through the green smooth country, which was not like the hilly north. It was all Nello could do to keep himself from pulling his basket from beneath the seat, and examining his new treasure. He could hear it rustling and fluttering its wings against the wickerwork. Oh, to be able to take it out, to give it some crumbs of biscuit which were still in his pocket, to begin to train it to know him! Nello only restrained himself painfully, by the thought that if he betrayed his own secret thus, his pigeon might be taken from him. How eager he was now to be there! "Are there many more stations?" he asked, anxiously; then counted them on his fingers—one, two, three. And how delighted he was when they came at last to the little place, standing alone in a plain, with no other house visible that Nello could see (but he did not look; he was so anxious about his pigeon), which was their journey's end. A kind of farmer's shandry, half cart, half gig, with a rough horse, and a rougher driver, was in waiting. Nello got his basket out with his own hands, and put his little great-coat over it, so that no one could see. His heart beat loudly with fright, lest his uncle should hear the sounds beneath the cover—the rustle and flutter. But Randolph's mind was otherwise engaged. As for the boy, he thought of nothing but this treasure, which he was so happy to feel in his arms. He could carry it so, quite comfortably, with the little great-coat over it; he neither remarked the rudeness of the jolting vehicle,

nor the bare country, with here and there a flat line of road running between turnip and potato fields. When they came to the house—a new, square house, in the middle of the fields—Nello thought nothing about it one way or another. He thought, “I wonder which will be my window; I wonder where I can keep the bird.” That was all. His little soul, all eagerness after his new delight, had room for nothing more.

Randolph and his charge were taken into a plain room, very simply furnished and not over-dainty in point of cleanness, where the principal of the school, a man in rusty black, came to receive them. There was nothing repulsive in his looks, nothing more in any way than the same plain unvarnished rusticity and homeliness which showed in his house. The school was intended for farmers' sons, and the education was partly industrial—honest, simple training, without either deceit or villany involved, though not at all suitable for Nello. It was with reluctance even that so young a boy had been accepted at all; and the schoolmaster looked at him with doubtfulness, as the slim little curled darling, so different from his other pupils, came in, hugging his basket.

“He's young, and he's small,” said Mr. Swan.

“Very young, and small for his age,” Randolph echoed. “All the more reason why he should lead an out-of-door life, and learn that he is a boy, and will one day be a man.”

Then Nello was put into the hands of the principal's wife, while Randolph gave further directions.

“His case is quite peculiar,” the uncle said. “He is an orphan, or as good as an orphan, and I took him from the hands of ladies who were making a fool of

the boy. What he wants is hardening. You must not be led away by his delicate looks; he is a strong boy, and he wants hardening. Send him out to the fields, let him learn to work like the rest, and don't listen to any complaints. Above all, don't let him send complaints home."

"I never interfere with what they write home," said honest Mr. Swan.

"But you must in this case. If he sends home a complaining letter, his aunt will rush here next morning and take him away. I am his uncle, and I won't permit that—and a family quarrel is what will follow, unless you will exercise your discretion. Keep him from writing, or keep him from grumbling. You will be the saving of the boy."

"It is a great responsibility to undertake. I should not have undertaken it, had I known——"

"I am sure you have too serious a sense of the good that can be done, to shrink from responsibility," said Randolph; "but, indeed, are we not all responsible for everything we touch? If you find him too much for you, write to me. Don't write to what he calls 'home.' And do not let him be taken away without my authority. I have to protect him from injudicious kindness. A parcel of women—you know what harm they can do to a boy, petting and spoiling him. He will never be a man at all, if you don't take him in hand."

With these arguments, Randolph overcame the resistance of the schoolmaster, and with redoubled injunctions that it was himself that was to be communicated with, in case of anything happening to Nello, went away. He was in haste to get back for his train;

and "No, no," he said "you need not call the boy—the fewer partings the better. I don't want to upset him. Tell him I was obliged to hurry away."

And it would be impossible to describe with what relief Randolph threw himself into the clumsy shandry, to go away. He had got the boy disposed of—for the moment at least—where no harm could happen to him, but also where he could do no harm. If his grandfather regained his consciousness, and, remembering that freak of his dotage, called again for the boy, it would be out of Mary's power to spoil everything by humouring the old man, and reviving all those images which it would be much better to make an end of. And when the Squire's life was over, how much easier to take all those measures which it was so advisable to take, without the little interloper about, whom foolish people would no doubt insist on calling the heir. The heir! Let him stay here, and get a little strength and manhood, to struggle for his rights, if he had any rights. More must be known of him than any one knew as yet, Randolph said to himself, before he, for one, would acknowledge him as the heir.

Nello was taken into Mrs. Swan's parlour, and there had some bread and butter offered to him, which he accepted with great satisfaction. The bread was dry and the butter salt, but he was hungry, which made it very agreeable.

"You'll have your tea with the rest at six," said Mrs. Swan; "and now come, I'll show you where you are to sleep. What is that you're carrying?"

"A basket," said Nello, in the mildest tone; and she asked no further questions, but led him up stairs,

not however to the little bedroom of which the child had been dreaming, where he could keep his new pet in safety, but to a long dormitory, containing about a dozen beds.

"This is yours, my little man, and you must be tidy and keep your things in order. There are no nurses here, and the boys are a bit rough; but you will soon get used to them. Put down your things here; this chair is yours, and that washing-stand, and——"

"Must I sleep there?" cried Nello. It was not so much the little bed—the close neighbourhood of the other boys—that appalled him; but where was there a window for his bird? "Mayn't I have that bed?" he said, pointing to one which stood near the window at the end of the room.

"I daresay," said Mrs. Swan; "why that is for the head boy, and you are the least, and the last. It is only by a chance that there is room for you at all here."

"But I don't want to be here," said Nello. "Oh, mayn't I be by the window? The head boy hasn't got a——. What would it matter to him? but I want to be at the window."

"My little master, you'll be where I choose to place you," said Mrs. Swan, becoming irritated. "We allow no self-will, and no rebellion here."

"But what shall I do with my——." Nello did not venture to name the name of the bird. He crept up to the head of the little bed which was to be allotted to him, and surveyed the blank wall tearfully. There was but a very little space between him and the next bed, and he was in the middle of the room,

the darkest part of it. Nello began to cry. He called upon Mary, and upon Martuccia, in his heart. Neither of them would suffer him to be treated so. "Oh, mayn't I go to another room where there is a window?" he cried, through his tears.

"My word, that one is a stubborn one; you will have your hands full with him," said Mrs. Swan, leaving Nello to have his cry out, which experience had taught her was the best way. She found her husband very serious, and full of care, thinking over the charge he had received.

"It's a gentleman's son, not one of the commoner sort," he said; "but why they should have brought him to me—such a little fellow—is more than I can see."

Nello sat by his little bed and cried. His heart was full, and his little frame worn out. In the state of depression which had followed upon the delight of the morning, novelty had departed, and strangeness had come in its place—a very different matter; everything was strange wherever he turned; and no place to put his pigeon! By and by the vacant spaces would fill, and boys—boys whom he did not know—big boys, rough boys, and that head boy, who had the window—would pour in; and he had no place to put his bird.

Nello's tears fell like summer rain upon the precious basket, till the storm had worn itself out. Then, first symptom of amelioration, his ear was caught by the rustle of the bird in the cage. He took it up, and placed it in his lap, then opened the cover a little way, and, entrancing moment! saw it—the glossy head, the keen little eye gleaming at him, the soft, ruffled

feathers. It made a small dab at him as he peered in—and oh, how delighted, how miserable, how frightened was Nello! He drew back from the tiny assault, then approached his head closer, and took from his pocket a bit of his bread and butter, which he had saved on purpose. Then he sat down on the floor, a small creature, scarcely visible, hidden between the beds, betraying himself only by the reverberation of the sobs which still shook his little bosom from time to time, entranced over his bird. The pigeon gurgled its soft coo, as it picked up the crumbs. The little boy, after his trouble, forgot everything but this novel delight; a thing all his own, feeding from his hand already, looking up at him sidelong, with that glimmer of an eye, with a flutter towards him if it could but have got loose. No doubt when he set it free it would come upon his shoulder directly. Nello lost himself and all his grief in pleasure. He forgot even that he had not a window in which to hang his bird.

By and by, however, there came a rush and tramp of feet, and eleven big boys, earthy and hot from the field where they had been working, came pouring in. They filled the room like a flood, like a whirlwind, catching Nello upon their surface as the stream would catch a straw. One of the big, hobnailed fellows stumbled over him as he sat on the floor.

“Hallo, what’s here?” he cried; “what little kid are you?” seizing the child by the shoulders. He did not mean any harm, but grasped the little boy’s shoulder with the grip of a playful ploughman. Then there was a rush of the whole band to see what it was. The new boy! but such a boy—a baby—a gentleman baby—a creature of a different order.

"Let's see him," they cried, tumbling over each other, while Nello, dragged to his feet, stood shrinking, confronting them, making trial of all the manhood he possessed. He would not cry; he drew back against his bed, and doubled his little fist, his heart heaving, his lip quivering.

"I have done no harm," said Nello, with a sob in his voice; and the head boy called out, good-humouredly enough, though the thunder of his boyish bass sounded to Nello like the voice of doom, to "let him be."

"What's he got there?" he asked.

The basket was snatched from the child's hand, notwithstanding his resistance. Nello gave a great cry when it was taken from him.

"Oh, my bird, my pigeon, my bird!—you are not to hurt my bird."

"Give it here," said the head boy.

But the first who had seized the treasure held it fast.

"I've got it, and I'll keep it," he cried.

"Give it here!" shouted the other.

The conflict and the cloud of big forms, and the rough voices and snatchings, filled Nello with speechless dismay. He leaned back against his bed, and watched with feelings indescribable the basket which contained his treasure pulled and dragged about from one to another. First the handle gave way, then the lid was torn off, as one after another snatched at it. Oh, why was Nello so small and weak, and the others so big and strong!

"Give it here!" shouted the head boy; but, in the midst of the scuffle, something happened which fright-

ened them all—the bird got loose, carefully as it had been secured, flew up over their heads, fluttered for a moment, driven wild by the cloud of arms stretched out to catch it, and then, with a sweep of its wings, darted out through the open window, and was seen no more.

CHAPTER X.

A Child Forlorn.

NELLO sobbed himself to sleep that night, scarcely conscious of the hubbub that was going on around him. He had watched with a pang unspeakable the escape of his bird, then had rushed blindly among the culprits, fighting and struggling in a passion of tears and childish rage, raining down harmless blows all round him, struggling to get out after it, to try to bring it back. Then Nello had been caught, too desperate to know who held him, in the hands of the head boy, who paid no more attention to his kicks and struggles than to his cries, and held him until, half dead with passion and misery, the poor little fellow sank exhausted, almost fainting, in the rough hands of his captors. Then the boys, who were not cruel, laid him on his bed and summoned Mrs. Swan. They all crowded round her to tell their story. Nobody had meant any harm. They had taken his basket to look at it, and the pigeon had got loose. "And it was a carrier!" the head boy said, regretfully. They were as sorry as Nello could be, though by this time, under the combined influences of loneliness, desolation, homesickness, weariness, and loss, poor little Nello was almost beyond feeling the full extent of his troubles. "He's a mammy's boy," said Mrs. Swan, who was rough, but not unkind. "He has never been at school before. A spoiled child, by all I can see." But why had a

spoiled child been sent here? This was what the good woman could not understand.

Nello slept and forgot his woes; and when he was awoke in the morning by the tumult, all the eleven jumping out of bed at once, performing their noisy but scanty ablutions, tossing boots about, and scrambling for clothes, the child lay trembling yet anxious, and half amused in spite of himself. The rough fun that was going on tempted Nello to laugh, though he was miserable. He shrank from them all, so big, so loud, so coarsely clothed, and in such a hurry; but he was tickled by their horse-play with each other—the hits and misses with which their missiles went and came. When the head boy was caught by a pillow straight in the face as he approached to execute justice upon one of the laggards, Nello could not restrain a little broken chuckle, which attracted the attention of the combatants. This, however, drew upon him the arrest of fate. “I say, little one, ain’t you going to get up?—bell’s rung!” said his next neighbour. The head boy was aggrieved by the poor little laugh. “Get up, you lazy little beggar!” he cried. “I say, let’s toss him!” cried another, with sudden perception of fun to be had easily. The boys meant no particular harm; but they made a simultaneous rush at the little trembling creature. Nello felt himself seized, he knew not for what purpose. Then the noise, and the rude, laughing faces—which looked to him in his fright like demons—all swam in giddy uncertainty round him, and the poor little fellow came down upon the floor, slipping out of their rough and careless hands, faint and sick and sore, his head turning, his little bones aching. But though in his giddiness and faintness he scarcely saw anything—even

the faces turning into misty spectres—Nello's spirit survived for a moment the collapse of his little frame. He got to his feet in a frenzy, and struck out at them with his white little childish fists. "I will kill you!" cried Nello, through his teeth; and a great horse-laugh got up. But this was soon extinguished in dismay and horror when the little fellow fell back fainting. They all gathered round, horror-stricken. "Lift him on his bed," said the head boy almost in a whisper. They did not know anything about faints; they thought the child was dead. Then there was a pause. In their horror it occurred to more than one inexperienced imagination to hide the little body and run away. "What can they do to us?" said another, awe-stricken. "We didn't mean it." For a moment the boys had all that thrill of horrible sensation which ought to (but, it would seem, does not always) accompany homicide. At the end, however, humanity prevailed over villanous panic, and Mrs. Swan was called to the rescue. The boys were too glad to troop away, already subject to punishment on account of being late, and, huddling together, went down to the school-room in a band, where vengeance awaited them—though not for Nello's murder, as some of them thought.

Nello came to himself at last, after giving Mrs. Swan a great deal of trouble; and there was nothing for it but to leave him in bed all day; for the child was bruised with the fall, aching in every limb, and too resentful and wretched to make any effort. He lay and cried and brooded, what between childish plans of vengeance and equally childish projects of escape. Oh, the pangs of impotence with which the small boy wronged contemplated the idea of those big fellows

who had been so cruel to him! How should weakness be aware that strength does not intend to be cruel? Nello could not be tolerant, or understanding, at his age, even if there had not been his aching bones to prove the wickedness of his assailants. He hated them all. How could he help hating them? He lay and planned what he would do to them. But Nello's dreams were not malicious. At the last moment, when they had suffered torments of dread in prospect of the punishment which he permitted them (in his fancy) to see approaching, Nello's vengeance suddenly turned into magnanimous contempt. He would not condescend to reprisals; he would crush them with forgiveness as soon as they saw his power. Such were the plans which the child lay and concocted, and which amused him, though he was not aware of it. But when the boys came in Nello shrank to the farther side of his bed; he would not look at them; he would not listen to the rough inquiries. When they went away again, however, and he was left alone, a sudden fit of longing came over him. Oh, to see somebody he knew!—somebody that was kind! Schemes of vengeance pall, like every other amusement. He gazed round upon the bare walls, the range of beds, the strange, ugly, desolate place. He could not tell if it was worse when the savages were there, filling it with noise, stumblings of heavy feet, cries of rough voices, or when the sounds all died away, and he was left lonely, not a soul to speak to him; no kind hand to touch his hot little head; nobody to give him a drink, though he wanted it so much. Nello had to clamber out of bed, to pour himself out a cup of water from the great brown jug, which he could scarcely lift—and fell upon

his bed again, utterly heartsick and desolate. Nobody to give him a drink! How they used to pet him when he had a headache! How Martuccia would croon over him, and bathe his head, and kiss his hands, and bring him everything she could think of to please him! And Mary would come and stand by his side, and put her cool, white hand upon his head—that hand which he had once called “as soft as snow.” Nello remembered the smile that came on Mary’s face when he had called her hand “as soft as snow.” He did not himself see the poetry of the phrase, but he thought he could feel again that mingled coolness, and softness, and whiteness. And Lily! Lily would sit by him all day long, and read to him, or sing to him, or tell him stories, or play when he got a little better and could play. A great lump came in Nello’s throat. “Oh, my Lily!” he cried, with a lamentable cry. He had no mother to appeal to, poor child—not even the imagination of a mother. Lily had been everything. Nothing had ever been so bad with him but could be borne when Lily was there. Naturally he had not so much felt the want of Lily when it was pleasure (as he thought) that he was going to. He could part with her without much emotion in the excitement of novelty and childish hope; but now——. Nello turned his face to the wall and sobbed. The lonely place—all the lonelier for bearing traces of that rude multitude—held him, a little atom, in its midst. Nobody heard his crying, or cared. He tore the bedclothes with his little frantic hands, with that sense of the intolerable which comes so easily to a child. But what did it matter that it was intolerable? Little Nello, like older people, had to bear it all the same.

It was best to leave the child quiet, the Swans thought. They were not unkind, but they were not used to take much trouble. The boys who came to them generally were robust boys, able to take care of themselves, and to whom it did no harm to be hustled about—who enjoyed the scimmages and struggles. Mrs. Swan had her own children to look after. “I’ve left him to himself; he’s better to be quite quiet,” she said to her husband, and the husband approved; “far better for him to be quiet.” Attempts to amuse a child, in such circumstances, would have been foolish, they thought, and as for petting and sympathising with him, far better that he should get accustomed to it, and make up his mind to put up with it like the rest. They could not make any difference between one and another; and if he had a day’s rest, and was allowed to lie in bed, what could the child want more? There was no imagination in the house lively enough to *envisager* the circumstances from Nello’s point of view, or to understand what chills of terror, what flushes of passion, came over the child, when the others poured in to bed again in the evening, driving him desperate with fear and wild with anger. Who could imagine anything so vehement in the mind of such a little boy? But Nello was not molested that next evening; they were disposed rather to be obsequious to him, asking, in their rough way, how he was, and offering him half-eaten apples and bits of sticky sweetmeats, by way of compensation. But Nello would not listen to these clumsy overtures. He turned his face to the wall persistently, and would have nothing to say to them. Even the tumult that was going on did not tempt him to turn round, though, after the first moment of fright,

the crowd in the room was rather comforting than otherwise to Nello. The sound of their voices kept him from that melancholy absorption in himself.

Next morning he had to get up, though he was still sick and sore. Nello was so obstinate in his refusal to do so, that the master himself had to be summoned. Mr. Swan would stand no nonsense.

"Get up, my boy," he said, "you'll get no good lying there. There has nothing happened to you more than happens to new boys everywhere. Come, you're not a baby to cry. Get up, and be a man."

"I want to go home," said Nello.

"I daresay you do; but you're not going home. So your plan is to make the best of it," said the schoolmaster. "Now come, I let you off yesterday; but I'll send a man to take you out of bed if you don't get up now. Come along, boy. I see you want to be a baby, as your uncle said."

"I am no baby," cried Nello, furious; but the schoolmaster only laughed.

"I give you half-an-hour," he said; and in half-an-hour, indeed, Nello, giddy and weak, managed to struggle down to the schoolroom. His watch was no longer going. He had forgotten it in the misery of the past day; it lay there dead, as Nello felt—and his bird was flown. He stumbled down stairs, feeling as if he must fall at each step, and took his seat on the lowest bench. The lessons were not much, but Nello was not equal to them. The big figures about seemed to darken the very air to the boy—to darken it, and fill it up. He had no room to breathe. His hand shook, so that he could not write a copy, which seemed a simple matter enough. "Put him at the very bottom; he

knows nothing," Mr. Swan said to his assistant; and how this galled the poor little gentleman, to whom, in his feebleness, this was the only way left of proving a little superiority, what words could say? Poor little Nello! he cried over the copy, mingling his tears with the ink, and blurring the blurred page still more. He could not get the figures right in the simplest of sums. He was self-convicted of being not only the least, but the very last, the dunce of the school. When the others went out to play, he sat wretched in a corner of the wretched schoolroom, where there was no air to breathe. He had not energy enough to do anything or think of anything; and it was only the sight of another boy, seated at a desk writing a letter, which put it into his head that he too might find a way of appeal against this cruelty. He could not write anything but the largest of large hands. But he tore a leaf out of the copybook, and scrawled a few lines across it. "I am verrey meeserble," he wrote; "Oh, Lily, ask Mary to come and take me home."

"Will you put it into a cover for me?" he said to the boy who was writing, who proved to be the very head boy who reigned over Nello's room. "Oh, please, put it into a cover. I'll forgive you if you will," cried Nello.

The head boy looked at him with a grin.

"You little toad, don't you forgive me without that? I never meant to hurt you," he said; but melting, he added, "give it here." Nello's epistle, written across the lined paper, in big letters, did not seem to require any ceremony as a private communication. The head boy read it and laughed. "They won't pay any attention," he said; "they never do. Little boys are always

miserable. And won't you catch it from Swan if he sees it!"

"It is for my sister Lily; it is not for Mr. Swan," cried the child, upon which the head boy laughed again.

That letter never reached Penninghame. The schoolmaster read it according to his orders, and put it into the fire. He wrote himself to the address which Nello had given, to say that the little gentleman was rather homesick, but pretty well; and that perhaps it would be better, in the circumstances, not to write to him till he had got a little settled down, and used to his new home. He hoped his little pupil would soon be able to write a decent letter; but he feared his education had been very much neglected hitherto, Mr. Swan wrote. Thus it came to pass that Nello lived on, day after day, eagerly expecting some event which never happened. He expected, first of all, Mary to arrive in a beautiful chariot, such as was wont to appear in Lily's stories, with beautiful prancing horses—(where they were to come from, Nello never asked himself, though he was intimately acquainted with the two brown ponies and the cob, which were all the inhabitants of the Squire's stables), and with an aspect splendid, but severe, to proceed to the punishment of his adversaries. Nello did not settle what deaths they were to die; but all was arranged except that insignificant circumstance. Mary would come; she would punish all who had done wrong; she would give presents to those who had been kind; and all the boys who had laughed at little Nello would see him drive away glorious behind those horses, with their arching necks, and high-stepping, dainty feet. Then after a

few days, which produced nothing, Nello settled, with a pang of visionary disappointment, that it was Mr. Pen who would come. He would not make a splendid dash up to the door like Mary in her chariot; but still he would deliver the little captive. Another day, and Nello, coming down and down in his demands, thought it might at least be Martuccia, or perhaps Miss Brown, who would come for him. That would not be so satisfactory to his pride, for he felt that the boys would laugh and jeer at him, and say it was his nurse who had come; but still even Miss Brown would be good to see in this strange place. At the end of the week, however, all Nello's courage fled. He thought then faintly of a letter, and watched when the postman came with packets of letters for the other boys. He could not read writing very well; but he could make it out if they would only write to him. Why would not they write to him? Had they forgotten him altogether, clean forgotten him, though he had been but a week away?

Nello did what he was told to do at school; but he was very slow about it, being so little, and so unused to work—for which he was punished; and he could not learn his lessons for brooding over his troubles, and wondering when *they* would come, or what they could mean; and naturally he was punished for that too. The big boys hustled him about; they played him a hundred tricks; they laughed at his timid, baby-washings, his carefulness, the good order to which he had been trained. To toss everything about, to do everything loudly, and noisily, and carelessly, was the religion of Mr. Swan's boys, as everything that was the reverse of this had been the religion

in which Nello was trained. Poor little boy, his life was as full of care as if he had been fifty. He was sent here and there on a hundred errands; he had impositions which he could not write, and lessons which he could not learn; and not least, perhaps, meals which he could not eat; and out-of-door tasks quite unsuitable for him, and which he could not perform. He was for ever toiling after something he ought to have done. He grew dirty, neglected, unkempt, miserable. He could not clean his own boots, which was one thing required of him; but plastered himself all over with mysterious blacking, in a vain attempt to fulfil this task, he who had scarcely dressed himself till now, scarcely brushed his own hair. He kept up a struggle against all these labours, which were more cruel than those of Hercules, as long as he had the hope within him that somebody must come to deliver him; for, with a childish jump at what he wished, he had believed that some one might come "to-morrow," when he sent, or thought he sent, his letter away. The to-morrow pushed itself on and on, hope getting fainter, and misery stronger, yet still seemed to gleam upon him, a possibility still. "Oh, pray God send Mary," he said, every night and morning. When a week was over, he added a more urgent cry, "Oh, pray God send *some one*, only some one! Oh, pray God take me home!" the child cried. He repeated it one night aloud, in the exhaustion of his disappointment, with an irrepressible moaning and crying: "Oh, pray God, take me home!" He was very tired, poor little boy; he was half wrapped in his little bit of curtain, to hide him as he said his prayers, and he had fallen half asleep while he said them, and was struggling with drowsi-

ness, and duty, and a hope which, though now falling more and more into despondency, still gave pertinacity to his prayer. He was anxious, very anxious to press this petition on God's notice. Repetition; is not that the simplest primitive necessity of earnest supplication? Perhaps God might not take any notice the first time, but He might the next. "Oh, take me home. Oh, pray God take me home!" God too, like Mary and the rest, seemed to pay no attention; but God did not require written letters or directions in a legible hand: He could be approached more easily. So Nello repeated and repeated, half-asleep, yet with his little heart full of trouble, and all his cares awake, this appeal to the only One who could help him, "Oh, pray God, pray God, take me home!"

But in this trance of beseeching supplication, half asleep, half conscious, poor little Nello caught the eye of one of his room-fellows, who pointed out the spectacle to the rest. "Little beggar! pretending to say his prayers; and much he cares for his prayers, going to sleep in the middle of them," they said. Then one wag suggested, "Let's wake him up!" It was a very funny idea. They got his waterjug, a small enough article indeed, not capable of doing very much harm. Had poor little Nello been less sleepy in his half-dream of pathetic appeal, he must have heard the titterings and whisperings behind him; but he was too much wrapt in that drowsy, painful abstraction, to take any notice, till all at once he started bolt upright, crying and gasping, woke up and drenched by the sudden dash of cold water over him. A shout of laughter burst from all the room, as Nello turned round frantic, and flew at the nearest of his assailants with impotent

rage. What did the big fellow care for his little blows? he lay back and laughed and did not mind, while the small creature in his drenched nightgown, his face crimson with rage, his little frame shivering, his curly locks falling about his cheeks, flew at his throat. The head boy, however, awakening to a sense of the indiscretion, and perhaps touched by a pang of remorse at sight of the misery and fury in the child's face, got hold of Nello in his strong arms, and plucked the wet garment off him, and threw him into his bed. "Let the child alone, I tell you. I won't have him meddled with," he said to the others—and covered him up with the bedclothes. Poor little Nello! he wanted to strike at and struggle with his defender. He was wild with rage and misery. His small heart was full, and he could bear no more.

After this, however, the boys, half ashamed of themselves, got quickly to bed; and darkness, and such silence as can exist in the heavy atmosphere where twelve rustics sleep and snore, succeeded to the tumult and riot. Nello, exhausted, sobbed himself to sleep under the bedclothes; but woke up in the middle of the night to remember all his wrongs and his misery. His cup was full; even God would not pay any attention to him, and it seemed to Nello that it would be better to die than to bear this any longer. Though the dark frightened him, it was less alarming than the rough boys, the hard lessons, the pangs of longing and waiting for a deliverance which never came. He had still the sovereign which Mary gave him, and the watch he had been so proud of, though that was dead now, and he had not spirit enough left to wind it up. It was October, and the nights were long. Though it

was but in reality between two and three o'clock in the morning, Nello thought it would soon be time for all these savage companions to get out of bed again, and for the noisy dreadful day to begin. He got up very quietly, trembling at every sound. There was a window at the end of the room through which the moon shone, and the light gave him a little consolation. He kept his eye fixed upon it, and groped for his clothes, and put them on very stealthily. If any one should hear him, he would be lost; but Nello's little rustlings, like a bird in the dark, what were they to break the slumbers of all those out-door lads, who slept violently, as they did everything else! No one stirred; the snoring and the breathing drowned all the little misadventures which chilled Nello with terror, as when his boots dropped out of his hand, or the buttons on his trousers struck shrilly against the chair. Nothing happened; nobody stirred, and Nello crept out of the room, holding his breath with the courage of despair. He got down stairs, trembling and stumbling at almost every step. When he got to the lower story, that kind moon, which had seemed to look at him through the window, almost to smile at him in encouragement and cheerful support, showed him a little window which had been left open by some chance. He clambered through, and found himself in the garden. There was a great dog in front of the house, of which Nello was in mortal terror; but here at the back there was no dog, only the kitchen garden, with the tranquil breadth of a potato-field on the other side of the hedge. It was not easy to get through that hedge; but a small boy not quite nine years old can go through gaps which would scarcely

show to the common eye. It scratched him, and tore his trousers; but there was nothing in such simple accidents to stop the little fugitive. And what it was to feel himself outside, free and safe, and all his tormentors snoring! Nello looked up at the moon, which was mellow and mild, not white as usual, and which seemed to smile at him. The potato-field was big and black, with its long lines running to a point on either side of him; and the whole world seemed to lie round him dark and still; nothing stirred, except now and then a rat in the ditch, which chilled Nello with horror. Had he known it was so early, the child would have been doubly frightened; but he felt that it was morning, not night, which encouraged him. And how big the world was! how vast, and silent, and solitary! only Nello, one little atom, with a small heart beating, a little pulse throbbing in the midst of that infinite quiet. The space grew vaster, the stillness more complete, the distance more visionary, and there was a deeper sable in the dark, because of Nello's little heart beating so fast, and his eyes that took everything in. What was he to do, poor little soul, there by himself in the open country, in the unknown world, all in the middle of the night?

CHAPTER XI.

A Crisis at Penninghame.

ALL this time the old Squire lay in the same stupor of death in life. He did not rally. Sometimes there was a look in his eyes—a quiver as of meaning, between the half-closed lids. But they could not tell what it meant, or indeed if it was anything but vague reflection of the light that would break in through a drawn curtain or raised blind. There he lay, day after day, wearing out all his nurses. If he ever slept, or ever was awake, no one could tell; but this old man, in the grip of deadly disease, lay there motionless, and tired out all the younger people who watched over him. A nurse had been got for him from the nearest town, and Mary was rarely out of the sick-chamber. Both of these attendants were worn to death as the monotonous days and nights went past; but the Squire lay just the same. They grew pale and hollow-eyed, but he apparently had stopped short at the point where he was when their vigil began.

In these circumstances all the world flocked to Penninghame to inquire for Mr. Musgrave. Rural importance shows in such circumstances. He was “by rights” the greatest man in the district, though superior wealth had come in and taken his pre-eminence from him—but everybody recollected his pretensions now. Inquiries came for him daily from every one near who

could pretend to be anything. The great great people, and the small great people, the new families and the old, the clergy (who were as good as anybody), and all who sought for a place among the gentry, with whatever hope or right, all interested themselves about the invalid. "His eldest son is still living, I believe. And what will happen when Mr. Musgrave dies?" the people asked. And all who had any possibility of knowing, all who had any right to know, exerted themselves to supply answers to this question. One had it on the best authority, that John Musgrave was waiting, ready to come home, and that there would be another trial immediately. Some, on the other hand, were certain that John Musgrave never would come home at all to tempt Providence. "There will be an effort made to pass him over, and make his little son heir instead," they said; and some believed it to be certain that the other brother would pension him off, so that the house might not be shamed by a convict squire.

Naturally, Mary knew nothing about these discussions. She spent her time in her father's room, relieving the nurse when her hours for sleep came, resting herself only when she could no longer bear up against the fatigue, seeing nobody but Mr. Pen and Lillas. Mary took little notice now of Nello's departure, and the schoolmaster's letter. It had all been done against her will, but she was too much occupied, now that it was done, to dwell upon it. It was very shameful that he was so backward, and perhaps Mr. Pen and Randolph were right in sending him to school. Her mind was too much pre-occupied for the moment to give anything but this half-angry, reluctant assent to what

had been done. And perhaps it would be better *now* if Liliias could go to school too, out of this melancholy house, out of the loneliness which was so hard upon the child. But Liliias was the only consolation Mary herself had; she had grown to be part of herself during this long year. It might be doing the child injustice, as she feared; but how could she send her only companion, her consoler and sympathiser, away? As for Liliias, though she was deeply moved by Nello's departure, the want of news of him did not move her much. Her father never wrote, never communicated with the child. They had not the custom of letters. It was very dreary, no doubt, but still when he came back unexpectedly, perhaps just at the moment he was most wanted, stepping in, with all the delight of surprise added to the pleasure of again seeing the absent, that was worth waiting for. This was the philosophy of the family. It was not their habit to write letters. Liliias accepted her own loneliness with resignation, not thinking of any possible alleviation; and she watched, sitting at the door of the old hall, for every one who might come along the road. It was October—the days getting short, the air more chilly; the sun less genial. The woods began to put on robes of colour, as if the rosy sunset clouds had floated down among them. The air blew cold in her face, as she sat outside the hall door. Martuccia within, in the background, shivered, and drew her shawl more closely across her ample shoulders. But Liliias did not feel the cold. She was looking out for some one—for papa, who might come all at once, at any time—for Mr. Geoff, who might bring news of papa—for something to come and break the monotony of this

life. Something Liliass felt sure must be coming; it could not go on like this for ever.

"Nello was always company for his sister," Mary said. Though she assented, she could not but complain. She had come out to breathe the air, and was walking up and down, Mr. Pen by her side. "It is very hard upon Lily, just at this moment, when everything is hanging in the balance, that her little brother should have been sent away."

"It would be very well," said Mr. Pen, "if you would send her away too. Nello wanted it. He would never have learned anything at home. He will come back so much improved. If he is to be received as the heir of everything——"

"If, Mr. Pen?"

"Well; I would not go against you for the world; but there is truth in what Randolph says. Randolph says there must be certificates of his birth, and all that; quite easy—quite easy to get—but where is your brother John to look after it all? He ought to be here now."

"Yes, he ought to be here. But would it be safe for him to come, Mr. Pen?"

"Miss Mary, I can't help wondering about that," said Mr. Pen, with troubled looks—had he grown unfaithful to John?—"if he is innocent, why shouldn't he come *now*? No jury would convict——"

Mary stopped him with a motion of her hand. "Randolph has been gaining you over to his side," she said. They were walking up and down the road close to the house. Just where the great gates ought to be—if the Musgraves were ever rich enough to restore the courtyard of the old Castle—was the limit

of their walk. Mary could not allow herself to be out of reach even for an hour. She was here, ready to be called, in case her father should come to any semblance of himself. "I do not say he has not some reason on his side, now that my father is—as he is. Everything seems to have grown so much nearer. It is dreadful not to know where John is, not to be able to communicate with him. I wrote to the last place where they were living—the place the children came from—but I have never had any answer. When my poor father goes—as go he must, I suppose—what am I to do?"

"You must let Randolph manage for you. Randolph must do it. God knows, Miss Mary, I don't want to go against you——"

"But you do," she said with a half smile. She smiled at it, but she did not like it. It is hard, even when a dog who has been your special follower turns away and follows some one else. "You never did it before since we have known each other, Mr. Pen."

Poor Mr. Pen felt the reproach. He was ready to weep himself, and looked at her with wistful, deprecating eyes; but was it not for her sake?

"I don't know what else to say to you. It breaks my heart to go against you," he said. "Whatever pleases you seems always best to me. But Randolph says—and I cannot deny it, Miss Mary, there's truth in what he says."

"Yes, there's truth in what he says. He has got the child away, and placed him out of reach, with your help, Mr. Pen; and he will push the father away, out of his just place, and make all the difficulties

double. He has put you against him already that was his friend, and he will put other people against him. I begin to see what he is aiming at!" cried Mary, clasping her hands together, with indignant vehemence.

Mr. Pen did not know what to say or do to soothe her. He was full of compunction, feeling himself guilty. He to have turned against her! He felt all the horror of it to his very heart.

"We should be just to Randolph too," he said, tremulously; "he means to do what is right. And if I seem to cross you, 'tis but to serve you, Miss Mary. How could you stand in the breach, and bear all that will have to be borne? If Randolph does not come to do what has to be done, you would have to do it; and it would be more than should be put upon you."

"Have I ever shrunk from what has to be done?" she said, with again a half smile of pained surprise.

Mr. Pen had no answer to make; he knew very well she had not failed hitherto; and in his heart he was aware that Randolph's motives were very different from Mary's. Still, he held with a gentle obstinacy to the lesson he had learned. It was going against her, but it was for her sake. They took one or two turns together in silence, neither saying any more. As they turned again, however, towards the house for the third time, Eastwood met them, hurrying from the door. Nurse had sent down stairs for Miss Musgrave, begging her to come without delay. The urgent message, and the man's haste and anxious, eager looks, frightened Mary. The household generally had come to that state of expectation which welcomes any event, how-

soever melancholy, as a relief to the strain of nerve and strength which long suspense produces. Eastwood was eager that there might be some change—if for the better, so much the better—but that was scarcely to be looked for—anyhow a change, a new event. The same thrill of anticipation ran through Mary's veins. Was it come now—the moment of fate, the crisis which would affect so many? She bade Mr. Pen to follow her, with a movement of her hand. "Wait in the library," she said, as she went up stairs.

While Mary took the air in this anxious little promenade up and down, Liliias sat at the hall door, looking out upon the road, looking far away for the something that was coming. She did not know that the rider on the pale horse was the most likely passenger to come that way. Happier visitors were in Liliias' thoughts—her father himself to clear up everything, who would go and fetch Nello back, and put all right that was wrong; or Mr. Geoff, who was not so good, but yet very comforting, and between whom and Liliias there existed a link of secret alliance, unknown to anybody, which was sweet to the child. Liliias was looking out far upon the road, vaguely thinking of Geoff, for he was the most likely person to come—he who rode along the road so often to ask for the Squire: far more likely than her father, who was a hope rather than an expectation. She was looking far away, as is the wont of the dreamer, pursuing her hope to the very horizon whence it might come—when suddenly, all at once, Liliias woke to the consciousness that there was some one standing near her, close to her, saying nothing, but looking at her

with that intent look which wakes even a sleeper when fixed upon him, much more a dreamer, linked to common earth by the daylight, and all the sounds and touches of ordinary life. She rose to her feet with a start—frightened yet satisfied—for here was something which had happened, if not the something for which she looked. But Liliass' eyes enlarged to twice their size, and her heart gave a great jump, when she saw that the figure standing beside her was that of the old woman whom she had met in the Chase.

'Lizabeth had come up unobserved from the water-side. She was dressed exactly as she had been when Liliass saw her before, with the hood of her grey cloak over her white cap—a stately figure, notwithstanding the homely dress.

Liliass gave a cry at the sight, and ran to her. "Oh, old woman!" she cried—"oh, I want to ask you—I want to ask you so many things."

"Honeysweet!" said 'Lizabeth, with a glow in her dark eyes. She did not for the moment think either of what she had come to say, or of the risk that attended her communications with her daughter's child. She thought only of the face she saw reflected in that other face, and of the secret property she had in the child who was so beautiful and so sweet. This was 'Lizabeth's heiress, the inheritor of the beauty which the old woman had been conscious of in her own person, and still more conscious of in the person of her daughter. Liliass was the third in that fair line. Pride filled the old woman's heart, along with the warm gush of tenderness. No one had ever looked at Liliass with such passionate love and admiration. She did not venture to take the child into her arms as she had

done in the solitude of the woods, but she looked at her with all her heart in her eyes.

Lilias seized her by the hand and drew her to the seat from which she had herself risen. "Come!" she said eagerly. "They say you know everything about papa—and I have a right to know; no one has so good a right to hear as I. Oh, tell me! tell me! Sit down here and rest. I once went up the hill, far away up the hill, to go to you, but there I met Mr. Geoff. Do you know Mr. Geoff? Come, come, sit down here and tell me about papa——"

"My darling," said 'Lizabeth, "blessings on your bonnie face! but I dare not stay. Some time—soon, if it's God's will, you'll hear all the like of you could understand, and you'll get him back to enjoy his own. God bless my bairn that would give me her own seat, and think no shame of old 'Lizabeth! That's like my Lily," the old woman said, with ready tears. "But listen, honey, for this is what I came to say. You must tell the lady to send and bring back the little boy. The bairn is in trouble. I cannot tell you what kind of trouble, but she must send and bring him back. My honey, do you hear what I say?"

"The little boy, and the lady?" said Lilias, wondering; then she exclaimed suddenly with a cry of pain, "Nello! my little brother!" and in her eagerness caught 'Lizabeth's hands and drew her down upon the seat.

"Ay, just your little brother, my honeysweet. My lad is away that would go and look after him, so you must tell the lady. No, no, I must not stay. The time will maybe come. But tell the lady, my darling. The little boy has need of her, or of you. He is too little

a bairn to be away among strangers. I cannot think upon his name—nor I cannot think,” said 'Lizabeth, with a gleam of grandmotherly disapproval, “what my Lily could be thinking of to give a little lad such an outlandish name. But tell the lady to send and bring him home.”

“Oh, I will go, I will go directly. Wait till I tell you what Mary says,” cried Liliias; and without pausing a moment, she rushed through the hall, her hair flying behind her, her face flushed with eagerness. The old woman stood for a moment looking after her with a smile; listening to the sound of the doors which swung behind the child in her rapid course through the passages which led to the inhabited part of the house. 'Lizabeth stood stately yet rustic in her grey cloak, with her hands folded, and looked after Liliias with a tender smile on her face. She had nothing left to be proud of, she so proud by nature, and to whom it was the essence of life to have something belonging to her in which she could glory. 'Lizabeth's pride had been broken down with many a blow, but it sprang up again vigorous as ever on the small argument of this child. Her beauty, her childish refinement and ladyhood, gave the old woman a pleasure more exquisite perhaps than any she had ever felt in her life. There was little in her lot now to give her pleasure. Her daughter was dead, her days full of the hideous charge which she had concealed for so many years from all the world; and she was old, approaching the end of all things, with nothing better to hope for than that death might release her unfortunate son before herself. At this moment even a worse terror and misery was upon her; yet as she stood there, looking after the little princess

who was of her blood, her representative, yet so much above anything that had ever belonged to 'Lizabeth, there was a glow through all her veins, more warm, more sweet than any she had ever felt in her life. Pride, and love, and delight swelled in her. Her child's child—heir of her face, her voice, all the little traits of attitude and gesture, which mark individuality—and yet the young lady of the Castle, born to a life so different from hers. She stood so, gazing after Liliás till the sound of her feet and the door, closing behind her had died away. Her heart was so full that she turned to Martuccia sitting motionless behind with her knitting. "Oh, that her life may be as sweet as her face!" she said involuntarily. Martuccia turned upon her with a smile, but shook her head and said, "Not speak Inglese." The sound of the voice called 'Lizabeth to herself. The smile faded from her face. Little had she to smile for, less than ever at this moment. She sighed, coming to herself, and turned and walked away.

Liliás ran against Mary as she entered the house at Eastwood's call. "Oh!" she cried, breathless, "Nello! will you send for Nello? Oh, Mary, he is in trouble, the old woman says—he is ill, or he is unhappy, or I cannot tell you what it is. Will you send for him, will you send for him, Mary? What shall I do? for papa will think it was my fault. Oh, Mary, Mary, send for my Nello! Wait a moment, only wait a moment, and hear what the old woman says——"

"Speak to her, Mr. Pen," said Mary; "I cannot stay." She was going to her father, who must, she felt sure, want her more urgently than Liliás could. Even then it went to Mary's heart to neglect the child's ap-

peal. "Mr. Pen will hear all about it, Liliias," she said, as she hastened up stairs. But Mr. Pen paid very little attention to what Liliias said.

"An old woman! What old woman? My dear child, you cannot expect us at such a moment as this—" said the Vicar. He was walking up and down the library with his ears open to every sound, expecting to be called to the Squire's bedside, feeling in his pocket for his prayer-book. For it seemed to Mr. Pen that the hasty summons could mean only one thing. It must be death that had come—and it would be a happy release—what else could any one say? But death, even when it is a happy release, is a serious visitor to come into a house. He has to be received with due preparation, like the potentate he is. Not without services of solemn meaning, attendants kneeling round the solemn bedside, the commendatory prayer rising from authorised lips—not without these formulas should the destroying angel be received into a Christian house. He was ready for his part, and waiting to be called; and to be interrupted at such a moment by tales of an old woman, by the grumblings of a fretful child sent to school against his will—even the gentle Mr. Pen rebelled. He would not hear what Liliias said. "Your grandfather is very ill, my dear," he told her solemnly, "very ill. In an hour or so you may have no grandfather, Liliias; he is going to appear in the presence of God——"

"Is he afraid of God, Mr. Pen?" asked Liliias with solemn eyes.

"Afraid!—you—you do not understand. It is a solemn thing—a very solemn thing," said the Vicar,

"to go into God's presence; to stand before Him and answer——"

"Oh!" cried the little girl, interrupting him, "Nello is far worse, far worse. Would God do him any harm, Mr. Pen? But cruel people might do a little boy a great deal of harm. God is what takes care of us. The old gentleman will be safe, quite safe there; but my Nello! he is so little, and he never was away from me before. *I* always took care of him before. I said you were not to send him away, but you would not pay any attention. Oh, my Nello, my Nello, Mr. Pen!"

"Hush, Liliias, you do not know what you are speaking of. What can Nello's troubles be? Perhaps the people will not pet him as he has been petted; that will do him no harm whatever—it will be better for him. My dear, you are too little to know. Hush, and let me listen. I must be ready when I am called for. Nothing that can happen to Nello can be of so much importance as this is now."

And the Vicar went to the door to look out and listen. Liliias followed him with her anxious eyes. She was awed, but she was not afraid for the old gentleman. Would God hurt him? but anybody that was strong could hurt Nello. She made one more appeal when the Vicar had returned, hearing nothing and leaving the door ajar.

"Mr. Pen! oh, please, please, think of Nello a little! What am I to do? Papa said, 'Lily, I trust him to you—you are to take care of him.' What shall I say to papa if he comes home and asks me, 'Where is my little Nello?' Papa may come any day. That is his way, he never writes to tell us, but when he can, he comes. He might come to-day," cried Liliias. "Mr.

Pen, oh, send somebody for Nello. Will you not listen to me? What should I say to papa if he came home to-day?"

"My dear little Lillas," said Mr. Pen, shaking his head mournfully, "your papa will not come to-day. Heaven knows if he will ever be able to come. You must not think it is such an easy matter. There are things which make it very difficult for him to come home; things of which you don't know——"

"Yes," said Lillas eagerly, "about the man who was killed; but papa did not do it, Mr. Pen."

Mr. Pen shook his head again. "Who has told the child?" he said. "I hope not—I hope not, Lillas; but that is what nobody knows."

"Yes," she cried, "Mr. Geoff knows; he told me. He says it was another man, and that papa went away to save him. Mr. Pen, papa may come any day."

"Who is Mr. Geoff?" said the Vicar; but he did not pay any attention to what the child was saying. There seemed to be a sound on the stairs of some one coming down. "Oh, run away, my dear! run away! Run and play, or do whatever you like. I have not time to attend to you now."

Lillas did not say a word more, or even look at him again, but walked away with a stately tread, not condescending even to turn her head towards him. In this solemn way she went back to the hall, expecting to find 'Lizabeth; but when she found that even the old woman was gone, in whom she put a certain trust as the one person who knew everything, Lillas had a moment of black despair. What was she to do? She stood and gazed out into vacancy—her eyes intent, her mind passionately at work. It was to her after

all, and not to Mary, that Nello had been intrusted, and if nobody would think of him, or attend to him, it was she who must interfere for her brother. She stood for a minute or two fixed—then turned hastily, paying no attention to Martuccia, and went to her room. Liliias, too, had a sovereign, which Mary had given her, and something more besides. She took her money out of its repository, and put on her hat and jacket. A great resolution was in her face. She had seen at last what was the only thing to do.

“I think, ma’am, there is a change,” the nurse said, as Mary noiselessly but swiftly, as long nursing teaches women to move, came into the room. The nurse was an experienced person. When Miss Brown, and even Mary herself, had seen “a change,” or fancied they had seen it, before, nurse had never said so. It was the first time she had called any one to the Squire’s room, or made the slightest movement of alarm. She led the way now to the bedside. The patient was lying in much the same attitude as before, but he was moving his hands restlessly, his lips were moving, and his head on the pillow. “He is saying something, but I cannot make out what it is,” the nurse said. Mary put her ear close to the inarticulate mouth. How dreadful was that living prison of flesh!—living, yet dead—the spirit pent up and denied all its usual modes of utterance. Mary wrung her hands with a sense of the intolerable as she tried in vain to distinguish the words, which seemed to be repeated over and over again, though they could make nothing of them. “Cannot you help us?—can you make it out? Is there nothing we can do?” she cried; “no cordial to give him strength?” but the nurse could only shake

her head, and the doctor when he came was equally helpless. He told Mary it was a sign of returning consciousness—which, indeed, was evident enough—but could not even say whether this promised for or against recovery. The nurse, it was clear, did not think it a good sign. He might even recover his speech *at the end*, she said. And hours passed while they waited, watching closely lest any faint beginning of sound should struggle through. The whole night was passed in this way. Mary never left the bedside. It was not that he could say anything of great importance to any one but himself. The Squire was helpless as respected his estate. It was entailed, and went to his eldest son, whether he liked it or not; and his will was made long ago, and all his affairs settled. What he had to say could not much affect any one; but of all pitiful sights, it seemed to his daughter the most pitiful, to see this old man, always so entirely master of himself, trying to make some communication which all their anxiety could not decipher. Could he be himself aware of how it was that no response was made to him?—could he realize the horror of the position?—something urgent to say, and no way of getting to the ears of those concerned, notwithstanding their most anxious attention? “No, no,” the nurse said; “he’s all in a maze; he maybe don’t even know what he’s saying;” and the constant movement and evident repetition gave favour to this idea. Mary stood by him, and looked at him, however, with a pain as great as if he had been consciously labouring on one side to express himself as she was on the other to understand him, instead of lying, as was most probable, in a feverish dream, through which some broken gleam of fancy or

memory struggled. When the chilly dawn broke upon the long night, that dreariest and coldest moment of a vigil, worn out with the long strain, she dropped asleep in the chair by her father's bedside. But when she woke hurriedly, a short time after, while yet it was scarcely full day, the nurse was standing by her with a hand upon her shoulder. The woman had grasped at her to wake her. "Listen, ma'am! he says—'the little boy,'" she said; Mary sprang up, shaking off her drowsiness in a moment. The old man's face had recovered a little intelligence—a faint flush seemed to waver about his ashy cheeks. It was some time before, even, now she could make any meaning out of the babble that came from his lips. Then by degrees she gleaned, now one word, now another. "Little boy—little Johnny; bring the little boy." She could scarcely imagine even now that there was meaning in the desire. Most likely it was but some pale reflection, through the dim awakening of the old man's mind, of the last idea that was in it. It went on, however, in one long strain of mumbled repetition—"Little Johnny—little boy." There seemed nothing else in his mind to say. The nurse laid her hand once more on Mary's arm, as she stood by her, listening. "If you can humour the poor gentleman, ma'am, you ought to do it," said the woman. She was a stranger, and did not know the story of the house.

What could Mary do? She sent out one of the servants to call Mr. Pen, who had stayed late on the previous night, always holding his book open with his fingers at the place, but who got up now obedient at her summons, though his wife had not meant to let him be disturbed for hours. Then the feeble demand

went on so continuously, that Mary in despair sent Miss Brown for Liliás, vaguely hoping that the presence of the one child, if not the other, might perhaps be of some use in the dim state of semi-consciousness in which her father seemed to be. Miss Brown went with hesitation and a doubtful look, which Mary was too much occupied to notice, but came back immediately to say that Miss Liliás had got up early and gone out. "Gone out!" Mary said, surprised; but she had no leisure to be disturbed about anything, her whole mind being pre-occupied. She went down stairs to Mr. Pen when he came. He had his prayer-book all ready. To dismiss the departing soul with all its credentials, with every solemnity that became such a departure, was what he thought of. He was altogether taken by surprise by Mary's hasty address—

"Mr. Pen, you must go at once and bring Nello. I cannot send a servant. He would not, perhaps, be allowed to come. If you will go, you can fetch him at once—to-morrow, early."

"But, Miss Mary——"

"Don't say anything against it, Mr. Pen. He is asking for the little boy, the little boy! Nello must come, and come directly. You would not cross him in perhaps the last thing he may ever ask for?" cried Mary, the tears of agitation and weariness coming in a sudden gush from her eyes.

"Let me send for your brother," said the Vicar. "Let me send for Randolph. He will know best what to do."

"Randolph! what has he to do with it?" she cried. "Oh go, Mr. Pen; do not vex me now."

"I will go." Mr. Pen closed his book with regret

and put it into his pocket. He did not like the idea that the old Squire should depart out of the world like any common man, uncared for. After his long connection with the family, that such a thing should happen without him! Mr. Musgrave had not perhaps been so regardful as was to be desired of all the services of the Church, and Mr. Pen was all the more anxious, now that he could have everything his own way, that all should be done in order. But how could he resist Mary's will and wish? He put his book in his pocket with a sigh.

"I will do what you wish, Miss Mary; but—it is a journey of many hours—and trains may not suit. Do you think he will—go on—so long?"

"He is asking for the little boy," said Mary, hastily. "Come and see him, and it will go to your heart. How can I tell you any more? We do not know even whether he is to live or to die."

"Ah, you must not cherish false hopes," said the Vicar, as he followed her up stairs. The servants were peeping on the staircase and at the doors; they were half disappointed, like Mr. Pen, that the "change" was not more decided. They had hoped that all was nearly over at last.

The darkened room, where the night-light was still burning though full day broke in muffled through the half-shuttered windows, was of itself very impressive to Mr. Pen, coming out of the fresh fullness of the morning light. He followed Mary, going elaborately on tiptoe round the foot of the great heavily-curtained bed. The Squire's head had been propped up a little. He had become even a little more conscious since Mary had left him. But his voice was so babbling and

inarticulate that Mr. Pen, unused to it, and deeply touched by the condition in which he saw his old friend and patron, could not make out the words—"Bring the little boy—the little boy, not Randolph—little Johnny: bring the little boy." Thus he went murmuring on, and there had gradually come a kind of wish into the face, and a kind of consciousness of their presence. "I wanted to bring Liliash, but Liliash they tell me has gone out; I cannot tell where she can have gone," Mary whispered. "And he never took any notice of Liliash—it is the boy he wants—listen, Mr. Pen, always the boy."

"I cannot make anything of it," said Mr. Pen, moved to tears.

"Oh listen! He says 'Not Randolph, the boy!' It is the boy he wants. Look! I almost think he knows you. Oh, what is it he wants?" cried Mary.

The light which had been so nearly extinguished was leaping up in the socket. A sudden convulsion seemed to run over the old man's frame: he made an effort to raise himself. His ashen face grew red, perspiration burst out upon his forehead. Ghost-like and rigid as he was, he moved himself upward as if to get from his bed. The nurse had put herself quietly at her post on one side and she called to Mary to go to the other, while poor Mr. Pen stood by helpless, as if he were assisting at a visible resurrection. "Don't get excited, ma'am," the nurse said steadily; "one moment! I hear the doctor coming up stairs."

The steady tread of some one approaching reassured the women as they half aided, half controlled, the spasmodic force of apparent recovery. The foot

came nearer and nearer, thank God. The door opened and some one came in.

It was not the doctor. It was a tall man with light hair mingled with grey and a fair complexion turned brown. He came straight into the room like one familiar with the place. Miss Brown, who stood near the door, recoiled with a quivering cry, and Mr. Pen, whom he encountered next, fell back with the same quaver of consternation in his voice. He went to where Mary stood, who alone had not looked at him, her eyes being intent on her father's face. He put her aside tenderly, taking her place. "This is my work as much as yours," he said.

CHAPTER XII.

Nello's Rescue.

THE house was very still in the afternoon languor—all its life suspended. Between the sick-room, in which all the interest of the family existence was absorbed, and the servants' part of the house, in which life went on cheerfully enough under all circumstances, but without any intrusion into the still world above stairs, there was nothing going on. Little Lillas went up into her own room, and down all the long staircases and passages, without meeting or seeing any one. Martuccia was in the old hall, tranquilly knitting and waiting for her young lady's return; but the house was empty of all sound or presence, nobody visible. It was like the enchanted palace through which the young prince walks, meeting no one, until he reaches the one chamber in which the secret lies. This idea passed through the mind of Lillas, pre-occupied as she was. Any one might come in—might pass from room to room, finding all deserted, until he had penetrated to the dim centre of the family life where death was hovering. She went down the oak staircase with her light foot, a little tremulous, but inspired with resolution. It was the afternoon of Nello's last day at school. He had not quite made up his mind, or been driven by childish misery, to the determination of running away when his sister set out to succour him. Had he waited, Lillas no doubt would have arrived in time

to introduce a new element into the matter; but what could the little girl's arrival have effected? Who would have given any importance to that? They would have taken Liliás in, and made a little prisoner of her, and sent her back. As it was, neither knew anything of what the other was doing. Liliás had opened her most secret place, a little old-fashioned wooden box, in which she kept some special relics, little trinkets, half toys, half ornaments, which she had brought with her, and the remains of the money which her father had given her when he sent the little party away. There had been something over when they arrived, and Liliás had guarded it carefully. She took it out now, and put the purse containing it within the bodice of her dress—the safest place. It might be wanted for Nello. He had the best right to everything; and if he was in trouble——Liliás did not try to think what kind of trouble the little boy could be in. She took her little store, and went away with her heart beating high. This time she would herself do it; she would not trust to any one. Mr. Geoff had undertaken to deliver her father, and stopped her; but he had not done it. Already a long time had elapsed, and nothing had happened. She would not trust to Mr. Geoff or any one this time. If old 'Lizabeth had not gone away before Liliás returned to the hall, she had thoughts of asking the old woman to go with her; and even a weak inclination to take Martuccia as a companion and support had crossed her mind. Martuccia would have been useless, but she would have made all the difference between a feasible expedition and an impossible one; but perhaps it was for this very reason that Liliás rejected the idea. No; this time she would be

kept back by no advice. She would go to Nello's aid by herself. He should owe his deliverance to no one but his sister. Who could understand him so well—know so well what he must want? And it was to her that papa had intrusted Nello. She made dismal pictures to herself of her little brother in trouble. What could "in trouble" mean? She thought of him as out in the cold, out in the rain, crying, with no place to go to; lost in a strange country, or perhaps ill with a fever, and nobody to sit by him, nobody to give him a drink when he wanted it, and tell him stories. What other kind of trouble was possible? That he might not be able to learn his lessons without her to help him, and that he might perhaps be whipped—could such an atrocity be?—just gleamed across the child's thoughts; but it made her heart beat so with rage and indignation, and her cheeks burn with such a flush, that she thrust the idea aside; but so long as he was unhappy, so long as he wanted her, was not that enough? She buttoned her little coat with a stout but trembling heart, and took a shawl over her arm (was not that how travellers always provided themselves?) and, with her sovereign in her hand for immediate expenditure, and her purse in her bosom, went down the silent stairs. How still, how deserted it seemed! Mr. Pen came out from the library door when he heard the step, to see who it was, but took no notice of her except a momentary glance of disappointment. Thus she went out of the house brave and resolute, yet with a tremor of the unknown in her breast.

Lilias knew what to do: to walk to Pennington, where the railway station was, and then to take a ticket, and to get into a railway carriage. The walk

along the highroad was long, but it was not so overwhelming as that early expedition she had made all alone up into the hills when she had met Geoff. How glad she had been to meet him, and to hear from him that she need go no further! Liliias had not ceased to believe in Mr. Geoff, but nothing had been done, and her heart was sick of the waiting. She did not want to meet him now; her little heart gave a jump when she saw any one riding towards her; but it was certain she did not want to meet Geoff, to have her mission again taken out of her hands. Nothing was more likely than that she should meet him, and her eyes travelled along the dusty line of road, somewhat wistfully looking out—in hopes not to see him—which much resembled the hope of seeing him, though it was differently expressed. And now and then a cloud of dust would rise—now and then a horseman would appear far off, skimming lightly over the long line of road, which it took Liliias so much time to get over. Once a beautiful carriage dashed passed her, with the beautiful lady in it whom she had once seen, and who had kissed and cried over Nello without taking much notice of Liliias. Could it be that the beautiful lady had heard too that he was in trouble? Liliias mended her pace and pushed on. What fancies she met with as she plodded along the road! It was a long dusty highway, running for a little while in sight of the lake, then turning through the village, then striking across the country up and down, as even a highroad is obliged to do in the north country, where there is nothing but heights and hollows. It seemed to stretch into infinity before Liliias, mounting one brae after another, showing in a long level line here and there; appearing on the

other side of that clump of trees, beyond that far-off farmhouse, looking as if it led without pause back to the end of the world. Liliás wove one dream after another as she went along from landmark to landmark. How vivid they were! So real, that the child seemed to enact every scene in them as they floated through her mind; far more real than the actual events of her life. She saw herself arriving, at a great spacious place, which was Nello's school—undefined, yet lofty and wide and splendid, with marble pillars, and great colonnades and halls. She saw people coming to gaze and wonder at the little girl—the little wandering princess—who had come to seek her brother. "The girl looked at them all, and said 'Take me to Nello.' The girl turned round upon them, and her lip curled with scorn." (Liliás suited the action to the word; and her innocent lip did curl, with what version of fine disdain it could execute.) "What did she care for all they could do for her? 'It is my brother I want,' she said." This was how she carried on her parable. Perhaps her own little figure was too much in the front of all these visions. Perhaps her own fine indifference to all blandishments and devotion to Nello was the chief principle made apparent. This was how it ran on, however, accompanying and shortening the way. She made long dialogues between herself and the master, between herself and Nello. How he clung to her; how glad he was that she had come. "It is Lily; I knew Lily would come," she made him say. He would not be surprised; he would know that this was the most natural thing. If they had locked her up in prison to keep her away from him, what would it have mattered? Liliás would have found a way to go to him when

Nello was in trouble; and Nello knew that as well as she.

She was very tired, however, and it was dark when she arrived at Pennington. Liliias put on her grand air, but it was rather difficult to impose upon the station-master and porters. They all wanted to be very kind, to take care of her, and arrange everything for the little traveller. The station-master called her "my dear," and wanted Liliias to go to his house, where his wife would take care of her till the morning. "You are too little to travel by the night train," he said; and the porters were eloquent on the wickedness of sending a little lady like this by herself. "I am going to my brother, who is ill," Liliias said, with dignity. "And have you no mamma to go to him, my little miss?" said the porter, friendly, yet respectful. They were all very kind. No one knew her, and they asked many questions to find out who she was. They said to each other it was well seen she had no mother, and made Liliias's heart swell so, that she forgave them for treating her as a child, rather than as the little princess she had dreamed of being. Finally, they arranged for her that she should travel to the great junction where Nello had met Bampfylde at once—and that the guard should take care of her, and put her in the night train, which arrived at a very early hour in the morning at the station she wanted to go to. All this was arranged for her with the kindest care by these rough men. They installed her in the little waiting-room till the train should go. They came and fetched her when it was going, and placed her in her corner. "Poor little lady!" they said. Liliias was half-humiliated, half-pleased by all these attentions. She submitted to them,

not able to be anything but grateful to the men who were so kind to her, yet feeling uneasily that it was not in this homely way that she meant them to be kind. They did not look up to her, but looked down upon her with compassionate tenderness, as upon a motherless little girl—a child who recalled children of their own. Just so the good woman looked upon her who got into the train along with her. “All that way, and all alone, my poor little thing?” the woman said. It hurt Liliás’s pride to be called a poor little thing, but yet it was pleasant to have some one to creep close to. The world did not seem to be as it is represented in books, for nobody was unkind. Liliás was very glad to sit close to her new acquaintance, feeling comfort unspeakable in the breadth of the honest shoulder against which she leant as she travelled on in the dark. Those breadths of country which Nello had watched flying past the window were almost invisible now. Now and then a darker gloom in the air showed where the hills were high over the railway in a deep cutting. Sometimes there would be gleams of light visible here and there, which showed a village. Her companion dropped into a doze, but Liliás, leaning against her, was far too much excited for sleep. She watched the moon come out and shine over the breadth of country, reflecting itself in the little streams, and turning the houses to silver. It was late then, quite late, for the moon was on the wane. And the train was slow, stopping at every station, creeping (though when it was in motion it seemed to fly) across the plains and valleys. It was midnight when they got to the junction, and Liliás, with her great eyes more wide awake than ever, was handed out. There were

only a few lights burning, and the place looked miserable and deserted, the cold wind sweeping through it, and the two or three people who got out, and the two porters who received them, looking like ghosts in the imperfect light. The guard, who lived there, was very kind to the little girl before he went off to his house. He wanted to take her with him to make her comfortable till the morning, but Liliás could not be persuaded to wait. At last he established her in a corner, the least chilly possible, wrapping her shawl round her feet.

There she was left alone, with one lamp to bear her company, the long lines running into darkness at either side of her, blackness taking refuge in the high roof of the station, above the watchlight of that one lamp. How strange it was to sit all alone, with the chill of the air and gloom of midnight all around her! Nobody was stirring in the deserted place. The one porter had withdrawn to some warm refuge, to reappear when the train came. But little Liliás sat alone in her corner, sole inhabitant of the big, chilly, desolate place. How her heart jumped to her mouth! What tremors and terrors at first every sigh of the wind, every creak of the lamp, gave her. But at last she perceived that nothing was going to happen, and sat still, and did not trouble except when imagination suggested to her a stealthy step, or some one behind in the darkness. How dreary it was! The night wind sang a dismal cadence in the telegraph wires, the air coursed over the deserted platforms, the dark lines of way, and blew the flames of gas about even within the inclosure of the lamp. Just then Nello was creeping, stumbling, out of the window, making his way through

the prickling hedge, standing alone eying the moon in the potato-field. Liliás could not even see the moon in her corner. Nothing was before her but the waning gleam of that solitary lamp.

At last the train came lumbering up through the darkness, and the porters re-appeared from corners where they had been attendant. One of them came for Lily, kind as everybody had been, and put her into a carriage by herself, and showed her how she could lie down and make herself comfortable. "You'll be there at five o'clock," the porter said. "Lie down, little miss, and get a sleep." Never in her life had Liliás been more wide awake, and there was no kind woman here with broad shoulders to lean upon and feel safe. The train swept through the night while she sat upright and gazed out with big, round unslumbering eyes.

Liliás watched and waked through the night, counting out the hours of darkness, saying her prayers over and over, feeling herself lost in the long whirl of distance and gloom and confusing sound; but as the night began to tremble towards the dawning, she began to doze unawares, her eyes closing in spite of herself, and much against her will; and it was with a shiver that she woke up very wide awake, but feeling wretched, in consequence of her doze, at the little roadside station, one small house placed on the edge of a wide expanse of fields, chiefly pasture land, and with no character at all. A great belt of wood stretched to the right hand, to the left there was nothing but fields, and a long endless road dividing them, visible for miles with a little turn in it here and there, but nothing beside to break its monotony. Liliás clam-

bered out of the carriage when she felt the jar and clang of the stoppage, and heard the name of the station drowsily called out. The man in charge of it gazed at her as though she had dropped from the clouds; he did not even see her till the train was in motion again, creaking and swinging away into the distance. To see her standing there with her great eyes gave him a thrill of strange sensation, almost of terror. Fatigue and excitement had made her face paler than usual, and had drawn great circles round her eyes. She looked like a ghost standing there in the faint grey of the dawn, cold and trembling, yet courageous as ever. "Mr. Swan's? Oh yes, I can tell you the way to Mr. Swan's; but you should have spoken sooner. They've been and carried off your luggage." Liliias had not strength of mind to confess that she had no luggage, and indeed was too much confused and upset by her snatch of sleep to be sure what he was saying, and stumbled forth on the road, when he showed her how to go, half-dazed, and scarcely more than half-conscious. But the pinch of the keen morning air, and the sensation of strange stillness and loneliness, soon restored her to the use of her faculties. The benevolent railway man was loth to let her go. "It's very early, and you're very small," he said. "You're welcome to wait here, my little lady, till they send for you. Perhaps they did not expect you so early?" "Oh, it does not matter," said Liliias. "Thank you; I am quite able to walk." The man stood and watched her as she made her way in the faint light along the road. He dared not leave his post, or he would have gone with her out of sheer compassion. So young, and with such a pale little beautiful face, and all alone at

such an hour of the morning, while it was still night! "It will be one of them boysees sisters," he said to himself with singular discrimination. And then he recollected the pale little boy who had gone to Mr. Swan's so short a time before. This gave a clue to the mysterious little passenger, which set his mind at rest.

And Liliás went on along the darkling road. It was not possible to mistake the road—a long white streak upon the landscape, which was visible even in the dark; and it was not altogether dark now but a ghostly, damp, autumnal glimmer of morning, before the sun-rising. The hedges had mists of gossamer over them, which would shine like rainbow webs when the sun rose. The fields glimmered colourless still, but growing every moment more perceptible in the chill dreariness of the season—not cold enough for frost, yet very cold. Everything was grey, the few shivering half-grown trees in the hedgerows, the sky all banked with clouds, the face of the half-seen landscape. There was one cottage by the roadside, and that was grey too, all shut up and asleep, the door closed, the windows all black. Little Liliás, the one moving atom in that great still landscape, felt afraid of it, and of herself, and the sound of her own steps, which seemed loud enough to wake a whole world of people. It seemed to Liliás that the kindly earth was dead, and she alone a little ghost, walking about its grave. None of her dreams, none of the poetry, nor anything out of her fairy lore could help her here. The reality was more than any dream. How still!—how very still it was!—how dark! and yet with that weird lightening which grew about her, making everything more visible moment by moment,

as if by some strange magical clearing of her own tired eyes! She was so tired, so worn out; faint for want of food, though she was not hungry—and for want of rest, though she did not wish to go to sleep. Such an atom in all that great grey insensible universe, and yet the only thing alive!

No—not the only thing. Liliás' heart contracted with a thrill, first of relief, then of fear when she saw something else moving besides herself. It was in one of the great fields that stretched colourless and vast towards the horizon. Liliás could not tell what it was. It might be a spirit; it might be an enchanted creature bound by some spell to stay there among the ploughed furrows; it might be some mysterious wild beast, the legendary monster, of whose existence children are always ready to be convinced. She concealed herself behind a bush, and looked anxiously down the long brown furrow. It was something very little—not so big as a man—smaller even than herself; something that toiled along with difficulty, stumbling sometimes, and falling in the soft earth. By and by a faint breath of sound began to steal towards her—very faint, yet carried far on the absolute stillness of the morning. Some one who was in trouble—some one who was *crying*. Liliás' bosom began to swell. She was very tired and confused herself; very lonely and frightened of the dead world, and of her own forlorn living-ness in it. But the sound of the feeble crying brought her back to herself. Did she divine already who it was? She scrambled through a gap in the hedge, jumped across the ditch, and plunged too into the yielding, heavy soil of the ploughed furrow. She was not surprised.

There did not seem to be anything wonderful in meeting her brother so. Had she not been sent to him because he was in trouble? It was natural that he should be here in the cold, dim morning, in the wild field, toiling along towards her, faintly crying in the last confusion and misery of childish weariness, his way lost, and his courage lost, and all his little bewildered faculties. She called out "Nello!"—cautiously, lest any one should hear—"Nello!" and then there was an outcry of amazement and joy—"Oh, Lily!" It was a half-shriek of incredulous happiness with which poor Nello, toiling through the field, weary, lost, forlorn, and afraid, heard the familiar sound of her voice. He was not so much surprised either. He did not think it was impossible, though nothing could have been more impossible to an elder mind. Children hold no such reckonings as we do with probability. He had been saying, "Oh, Lily! my Lily!" to himself—crying for her—and here she was! He had no doubt of it, made no question how she got there, but threw himself upon her with a great cry that thrilled the dim morning through and through, and made the sleep-bound world alive.

And they sat down together in the furrow, and clung to each other, and cried—for misery, but for happiness too. All seemed safe now they had found each other. The two forlorn creatures, after their sleepless, wintry night, felt a sudden beatitude creep over their little weary bodies and aching hearts. Two—how different that is from one! They held each other fast, and kissed, and were happy in the dark furrow, which seemed big enough and dark enough to furnish them both with a grave.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Babes in the Wood.

"ARE you very hungry, Nello?"

"Oh, very, *very*. Are you? I have not had any breakfast. It was night, dark night when I came away. Have you had any breakfast, Lily?"

"How could I, when I have been in the railway all the night? Do you think you can get over the ditch? Jump! I jumped, and you always could jump better than I."

"You forget everything when you go to school," said Nello, mournfully, "and I am all trembling, I cannot help it. It is so cold. Oh Lily, if they come up—if they find us—you will not let them take me back?"

"Never, Nello! but let us get on, let us get on to the railway. Quick, it is not far off. If you would only jump. Now give me your hand. I am cold too, but we must get over it, we *must* get over it!" said Lillas, almost crying. Poor Nello's limbs were cramped, he was chilled to the heart. He did not feel it possible to get on, all the courage was gone out of him. He had kept up until, after scrambling through many rough places, his poor little feet had sunk in that soft, newly-ploughed furrow. This had taken all the life out of him, and perhaps his meeting with Lillas, and the tumult of joyful emotion it caused, had not increased Nello's power of endurance. He had always

had the habit of trusting to her. But Lily it was quite certain could not drag him over the ditch. He made an effort at last to jump and failed, and stuck in the mud. That accident seemed at the moment to make an end of them both in their utter weariness. They mingled their tears, Liliás hanging on upon the bank above, Nello in the heavy soil below. The cry relieved them however, and by and by, by the help of his sister's hand, he managed to scramble up the bank, and get through the scattered bushes on to the highroad. One of his feet was wet and clogged with the mud, and oh, how tired they both were, fit for nothing but to lie down and cry themselves to sleep.

"Oh, Nello, if you were at home, should you ever—ever want to go away again?"

Nello did not make any reply. He was too tired for anything but a dull little sob now and then, involuntary, the mere breathing of his weakness. And the highway looked so long, longer even than the fields. There was always some hope at the end of a field that deliverance might come round the corner, but a long unchangeable highway, how endless it was! They went on thus together for a little way in silence; then: "Oh, Lily, I am so hungry," said Nello. What could she do? She was hungry too, more hungry than he was, for she had eaten nothing since the afternoon of the previous day.

"I have a shilling in my pocket, but we cannot eat a shilling," said poor Liliás.

"And I have a shilling too—more than that—I have the golden sovereign Mary gave me."

"We must just hurry—hurry to the railway, Nello, for we cannot eat money, and the railway will soon

take us home; or there is a place, a big station, where we could buy a cake. Oh!" cried Liliás, with a gleam of eager satisfaction in her eyes.

"What is it, Lily?"

"Look, only look!" She dragged him forward by the arm in her eagerness. "Oh, a few steps further, Nello—only a few steps further—look!"

The roadside cottage which had been so blank as she passed had awoke—a woman stood by the door—but the thing that caught Liliás' eye was a few stale cakes and opaque glasses with strange confectionery in them. It was these that gave strength to her wearied feet. She hurried forward, while the woman looked at the strange little pair in wonder. "Oh, will you give us a little breakfast," she said, "a little milk to drink, and some bread and butter for this little boy?"

"Where have you come from, you two children, at this hour in the morning?" cried the woman in consternation.

"Oh, we are going to the train," said Liliás. "We are obliged to go; we must get the early train, and we don't know, we don't quite know when it goes; and my poor little brother has fallen into the mud—see! and—he got his breakfast so very early before he came away that he is hungry again. We have plenty of money," cried the little girl, "plenty of money! We will give you a shilling if you will give us some milk and bread."

"A shilling—two, three shillings," said Nello interposing. He was so hungry; and what was the good of shillings?—you could not eat them. The woman looked at them suspiciously. They were not little

tramps; they were nicely-dressed children, though the little boy was so muddy. She did not see what harm it could do to take them in; likewise her heart was touched by the poor little things standing there looking up at her as though she was the arbiter of their fate.

"You may come in and sit by the fire; there's no train for two hours yet. It's not six o'clock. Come in, you poor little things, and rest, and I'll give you some nice hot tea. But you must tell me all the truth, for I know you've run away from somewhere," she said.

"No," said Liliias, looking her in the face. "Oh no, I have not run away from anywhere. My little brother was not happy, and I came to fetch him, that is all. I did not run away."

"And what sort of people was it that sent a baby like you?" said the woman. "Come in, you poor little things, and sit by the fire. What could your mother be thinking of to send you——"

"We have not got any mother." Nello took no share in this conversation. He was quite lost in the delight of the hard old settle that stood by the fire. Nestling up into the corner he thought he should like to fall asleep there, and never move any more. "We have not got any mother," Liliias said, "and who could come but me? No one. I travelled all night, and now I am going to take him home. We are children without any mother." Liliias could not but know that these words were a sure passport to any woman's heart.

"You poor little things!" the woman said, with the tears in her eyes. Whether it has its origin in the

self-complacency of woman-kind, it is difficult to say, but whereas men are generally untouched by the unhappiness of being fatherless, women are without defence in most cases before a motherless child. Such a plea has instant recognition with high and low. No mother!—everything is pardoned, everything conceded to a creature with such a plea. She was not quite satisfied with the story, which seemed to her very improbable, but she could not refuse her succour to the motherless children. Her little shop, such as it was, had no visitors till much later in the day, when the village children went past her door to school. She had made her own tea, which stood keeping itself hot upon the hob, and she came in hastily and put out cups and saucers, and shared the hot and comfortable fluid, though it was very weak and would not have suited more fastidious palates than the children's. What life it seemed to pour into their wearied little frames! The bread was coarse and stale, but it tasted like bread from heaven. Nello in his corner of the settle began to blink and nod. He was even falling asleep, when suddenly a gig rattled past the windows. The child sprang up in a moment. "Oh, Lily, Lily!" he cried in horror, "they are after me! what shall I do?"

The woman had gone to the back of the house with the cups they had used, and so was not near to hear this revelation.

"Who is it?" cried Liliias, peering out of the window. She was restored to herself, and the name of an enemy, a pursuer, put her on her mettle. She had never encountered such a thing before, but she knew everything about it, how to behave. "Come,

Nello, come," she said, "we will go out the back way while nobody is looking. Let us go away, let us go away before any one can come here."

Lilias seized some of the cakes which the woman had put in paper for them; wonderful productions, which nothing but a child's appetite could contemplate, and put down two shillings in the centre of the table. On second thoughts it seemed better to her to go out at the front and get round under cover of the hedge to the wood on the other side of the station, which appeared temptingly near, rather than incur the risk of speaking to the woman. It did not occur to her that her own presence was enough to put any one completely off the scent who was seeking Nello. She got him away out of the house successfully, and through the gap behind the hedge where was a little footpath. "Now we must run—run! We must get past, while they are asking at the station. We must not say a word to the woman or any one. Oh, Nello, run—run!" Nello, still more anxious than she was, managed to run for a little way, but only for a little way. He broke down of all places in the world opposite to the station, where Mr. Swan was standing talking to the keeper. When Nello saw him through the hedge he turned round and clasped his sister convulsively, hiding his face on her shoulder. Lilias did not dare to say a word. They were hid from view, yet any movement might betray them, or any sound. She stood with trembling limbs, bearing Nello's weight upon her shoulder, and watched through the hawthorn bush.

"Nobody has been here, not a mouse, far less a little boy. The train is not due for two hours," said the station-keeper.

"A bit of a little fellow," said Mr. Swan. "I can't think he could have got so far; more likely he's lying behind a hedge somewhere; but I thought it best to try first here."

"He's not here," the station-keeper said again. He answered curtly, his sympathies being all with the fugitive, and he could not but give the troubled schoolmaster a corner of his mind. "It's only a month since you lost the last one," he said. "If it was my house the boys ran away from I should not like it."

"Talk of things you know something of," said Mr. Swan hotly; and then he added, shaking his head; "It is not my fault. My wife and I do everything we can, but it's those rough boys and their practical jokes."

"Little fellows, they don't seem to understand them kind of jokes," said the railway man.

Mr. Swan shook his head. It was not his fault. He was sorry and vexed, and ashamed. "I would rather have lost the money twice over," he said. Then he turned and gave a searching glance all round. Lillas quaked and her heart sank within her. She held her little brother close to her breast. If he should stir, if he should cry, all would be over. She knew their situation well enough. Either their enemy would go away and get bloodhounds, and fierce wicked men to put on their track, during which time the fugitives would have time to get into some wonderful cave, or to be taken into some old, old house by some benevolent stranger, and so escape; or else he would come straight to the very place where they were, guided by some influence unfavourable to them. Lillas stood

and held her breath. "Oh, be still, Nello, be still, he is looking!" she whispered into Nello's ear. Her limbs were nearly giving way, but she resisted fate and held out.

The schoolmaster made long inspection of all the landscape. "He was specially commended to me, too—I was warned—I was warned," he said. Then he turned to the station-keeper, giving him the most urgent injunctions. "If he comes here you will secure him at once," he said, filling Lillas with dismay, who did not see the shrug of the man's shoulders, and the look with which he turned aside. Thus their retreat was cut off, the little girl thought, with anguish indescribable; how then were they to get home? This thought was so dreadful that Lillas was not relieved as she otherwise would have been by the sound of the wheels and the horse's hoofs as the gig turned, and their enemy drove away. He had gone in his own person, but had he not left a horrible retainer to guard the passage? And how, oh how was she to take Nello home? She did not know where the next station was. She did not know the way in this strange, desolate, unknown country. "Nello," she cried, in a whisper of despair, "we must get into that wood, it is the only thing we can do; they will not look for us there. I don't know why, but I feel sure they will not look for us there. And perhaps we shall meet some one who will take care of us. Oh, Nello, rouse up, come quick, come quick. Perhaps there may be a hermit living there, perhaps——. Come, Nello, can you not go a little further? Oh, try, try."

"Oh, Lily, I am so tired—I am so sleepy."

"I am tired too," she said, a little rush of tears

coming to her eyes; and then they stumbled on together, holding each other up. The wood looked gay and bright in the early morning. The sun had come out, which warmed everything, and the bright autumn colour on the trees cheered the children as a similar hour, and the beauty of the wild creature of the woods, cheered the poet:—

“Si che a bene sperar m’era cagione
Di quella fera alla gaietta pelle
L’ora del tempo, e la dolce stagione.”

The trees seemed to sweep with a great luxuriance of shadow over a broad stretch of country. It must be possible to find some refuge there. There might be—a hermit, perhaps, in a little cell, who would give them nuts and some milk from his goat—or a charcoal burner, wild but kind, like those Liliās remembered to have seen in the forest with wild locks hanging over their eyes. If only no magician should be there to beguile them into his den, pretending to be kind! Thus Liliās mixed fact and fiction, her own broken remembrances of Italian woods sounding as fictitious among the English elms and beeches as the wildest visions of fancy. For this wood, though it had poetic corners in it, was traversed by the highroad from end to end, and was as innocent of charcoal-burners as of magicians. And it turned out a great deal further off than they thought. They walked and walked, and still it lay before them, smiling in its yellow and red, waving and beckoning in the breeze, which was less chilly now that the sun was up. The sun reached to the footpath behind the hedge, and warmed the little wayfarers through and through—that was the best thing that had happened to them—for how good it is

to be warmed when one is chilled and weary; and what a rising of hope and courage there is when the misty dawn disperses before the rising of the brave sun!

Nello almost recovered his spirits when he got within the wood. There were side-aisles even to the highroad, and deep corners in its depths where shelter could be had, and the ground was all flaked with shadow and sunshine; and there were green glades, half visible at every side, with warm grass all lit by the sun.

"Let us go and sit down, Lily. Oh, what a pretty place to sit down! Oh, Lily, I cannot—I cannot walk any more; I am so tired," cried Nello.

"I am tired too," she said, with a quiver in her mouth, looking vainly round for some trace of the charcoal-burner or of the hermit. All was silent, sunny, fresh with the morning, but vacant as the fields. And Lilius could not be satisfied with mere rest, though she wanted it so much. "How are we to get home, if we dare not go to the railway? and there is no other way," she said. "Oh, Nello, it will be very nice to rest—but how are we to get home?"

"Oh, never mind; I am so tired," said weary little Nello. "Look, Lily, what a warm place. It is quite dry, and a tree to lean against. Let us stay here."

Never had a more tempting spot been seen; green soft turf at one side of the big tree, and beech-mast, soft and dry and brown, the droppings of the trees, on the other. The foot sank in it, it was so soft, and the early sun had dried it, and the thick boughs overhead had kept off the dew. It was as soft as a bed of velvet, and the little branches waved softly over it,

while the greater boughs, more still, shaded and protected the children. They sat down, utterly worn out, and Liliás took out her cakes, which they ate together with delight, though these dainties were far from delicious; and there, propped up against each other, an arm of each round the other, Nello lying across Liliás' lap, with his head pillowed upon her; she, half seated, half-reclining, holding him, and held in her turn by a hollow of the tree: these babes in the wood first nodded, then dozed, and woke and dozed again, and finally, the yellow leaves dropping now and then upon them like a caress of nature, the sun cherishing their little limbs, fell fast asleep in the guardianship of God.

CHAPTER XIV.

The New-Comer.

NOBODY in the sick-room said a word of the great consternation and wonder and fear that sprang to life in them at the appearance of the stranger. How could they, though their hearts were full of it? when all their care and skill were wanted for the patient, who, half-conscious, struggled with them to raise himself, to get out of bed. To find out what he wanted, to satisfy the hazy anxiety in his mind, and do for him the something, whatever it was, that he was so anxious to do, was the first necessity of the moment, notwithstanding the new excitement which was wild in their veins. Where did he come from? How had he got here?—familiar, unmistakable, as if he had been absent but a day. How did he know he was wanted? And was it he—really *he*—after all those dreary years? These questions surged through the minds of all the bystanders, in an impetuous, yet secondary current. The first thing, and the most urgent, was the Squire. Brother and sister, friend and friend, had not leisure to take each other by the hand, or say a word of greeting.

Mary and her newly-arrived assistant stood side by side, touching each other, but could not speak or make even a sign of mutual recognition. *He* took her place in supporting, and, at the same time, restraining the patient. *She* held her father's hand, with which

he seemed to be appealing to some one, or using, in dumb show, to aid some argument.

"The little boy," he said, hoarsely, "bring me the little boy."

"Is it Nello he means?" the stranger asked, in a low voice.

"I—think so—I—suppose so," said Mary, trembling, and wholly overcome by this strange ease and familiarity, and even by the sound of the voice so long silent in this place. But he took no notice—only followed his question by another.

"Why not bring the child then? That might satisfy him. Does he care for the child, or is it only a fancy, a wandering in his head? Anyhow, let them bring him. It might be of some use."

"Do you think he—knows? Do you think he understands—and—means what he is saying?"

Mary faltered forth these words, scarcely knowing what she said, feeling that she could not explain how it was that Nello was not near—and finding it so strange, so strange to be talking thus to—John; could it be really John? After all that had sundered them, after the miseries that had passed over him, the price still set upon his head, was it he who stood so quietly, assuming his household place, taking his part in the nursing of the old man? She could not believe her senses, and how could she talk to him, calmly as the circumstances required, gently and steadily, as if he had never been away?

"Most likely not," he said; "but something has excited his fancy, and the sight of my boy might calm it. Let some one bring Nello."

He spoke with the air of one used to be obeyed,

and whom also in this particular it would be easy to obey.

"We sent him to school. I am very sorry—I was against it," said Mary, trembling more and more.

Mr. Pen was frightened too. It is one thing doing "for the best" with a little unprotected parentless child, and quite a different thing to answer the child's father when he comes and asks for it. Mr. Pen paled and reddened ten times in a minute. He added, faltering—

"It was by my advice—John. I thought it was the best thing for him. You see I did not know——"

Here he broke off abruptly, in the confusion of his mind.

"Then it is needless saying any more," said the stranger, hastily, with a tone in which a little sharpness of personal disappointment and vexation seemed to mingle.

This conversation had been in an undertone, as attendants in a sick-room communicate with each other, without intermitting their special services to the patient. The Squire had been still in their hands for the moment, ceasing to struggle, apparently caught in some dim confused way by the sound of their voices. He looked about him confusedly, like a blind man, turning his head slightly, as if his powers were being restored to him, to the side on which John stood. A gleam of half-meaning, of interest, and wavering, half roused attention, seemed to come over his face. Then he sank back gently on his pillows, struggling no longer. The paroxysm was over. The nurse withdrew her hand with a sigh of relief.

"Now," she said, "if we leave him perfectly quiet,

he may get some sleep. I will call you in a moment if there is any change."

The woman saw, with her experienced eyes, that something more than could be read on the surface was in this family combination. She put them gently from the bedside, and shaded the patient's eyes from the light, for it was nearly noon by this time, and everything was brilliant outside. The corridor, however, into which they passed outside was still dark, as it was always, the glimmering pale reflections in the wainscot of the long narrow window on the staircase being its sole communication with the day.

Mary put out her hands to her brother as they emerged from the sick-room.

"Is it you—you, John?"

"Yes," he said, grasping them, "it is I. I do not wonder you are startled—I heard my father was worse—that there was a change—and came in without warning. So Nello has been sent away? May I see my little girl? You have been good to her, I am sure, Mary."

"I love her," said Mary, hastily, "as if she were my own. John, do not take my little companion away."

He had been grave enough, and but little moved hitherto by the meeting, which was not so strange or unlooked for to him as to them. Now his countenance beamed suddenly, lighting all over, and a tender moisture came to his eyes.

"It is what I have desired most for her," he said, and took his sister's hands again and kissed her cheek. "But send for my little Lily," he added, with an indescribable softening in his voice.

Here Miss Brown, who had been following, came out from the dusk of the room behind. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I did not like to tell you in your trouble; but I'm very uneasy about Miss Lily."

"Has she never come in yet? You said she had gone out for a walk."

"I said whatever I could think of to save you, Miss Mary. We none of us know where she's gone. I've sent everywhere. She is not at the Vicarage, nor she's not at the village; and—oh, what will Mr. John think of us?" cried the woman in tears. "Not one in the house has seen her since yesterday, and Martuccia, she's breaking her heart. She says Miss Lily has gone after her brother; she says——"

"Is Martuccia here?"

"Yes, sir," said Miss Brown, with a curtsy. She could not take her eyes off him, as she afterwards said. More serious, far more serious than when he was a young gentleman always about the house, but the same man—still the same man.

"Then send her to me at once. It is you, Martha, the same as ever," he said, with a momentary smile in the midst of his anxiety. Just as Mr. John used to do—always a kind word for everybody, and a smile. She made him another curtsy, crying and smiling together.

"And glad, glad, sir, to see you come home," she said. There was this excuse for Miss Brown's lingering, that Mary had rushed off at once to find Martuccia. John bowed his head gravely. He had grown very serious. The habit of smiling was no longer his grand characteristic. He went down stairs and into the library, the nearest sitting-room in his way, the

door of which was standing open. Eastwood was there lingering about, pretending to put things in order, but in reality waiting for news of the old Squire. Eastwood knew that he had not let this man in. He had not got admission in any legitimate way. "I beg your pardon, sir," he began, not altogether respectfully, with the intention of demanding what he did there.

"What?" said the stranger, looking up with a little impatience.

Eastwood drew back with another "Beg your pardon, sir!" and his tone was changed. He did not know who it was, but he dared not say anything more. This was the strangest house in the world surely, full of suspicions, full of new people who did not come in at the front door.

When Martuccia came, her story, which had been almost inarticulate in her broken English, flowed forth volubly enough to her master, whom she recognised with a shriek of delight. She gave him a clear enough account of what had happened. How an old woman had come, a peasant of the country, and told Miss Lily that her little brother was in *trouble*. This word she transferred to her narrative without attempting to translate it, so that Mary, standing by, who did not understand the rest, seemed to hear nothing but this word recurring again and again. "Trouble!" it was an ominous word. Nothing but trouble seemed to surround them. She stood and listened anxiously, though she did not understand.

"It is clear, then," said her brother, turning to her, "that Lily has gone after her little brother, supposed to be in some mysterious trouble. When did he go,

and where did he go, and who persuaded you to send him away?"

"It was Randolph—Randolph has been here. I believe he wanted to be kind. He said Nello was being ruined here, and so did Mr. Pen. It was against my will—against my wish."

"Randolph!" he said. This alarmed him more than all the rest. "Both my children! I thought I should find them safe—happy in your hands, whatever happened to me——"

"Oh John, what can I say?" cried Mary, wringing her hands. No one could be more guiltless of any unkind intention, but, as was natural, it was she who bore the blame. A man may be pardoned if he is a little unjust in such circumstances. John was ready to rush out of the house again directly to go after his children, but what could be done unless the railway helped him? Mary got the time-tables and consulted them anxiously; and Mr. Pen came in and stood by, very serious and a little crestfallen, as one of the authors of the blunder. And it was found, as so often happens, that nothing was to be done at the moment. The early train was going off as they talked, the next did not go till the evening, the same by which Lillas had travelled on the night before. And in the meantime, what might be happening to the little girl, who was wandering about the world in search of her brother? While the brother and sister consulted, Mr. Pen looked sorrowfully over their heads, which were bent over these time-tables. He did not himself pretend to understand these lines of mysterious figures. He looked from one face to another to read what they

meant. He was too much abashed by his own share in the misfortune to put forward his advice. But when he saw that they were both at their wits' end, Mr. Pen suggested that the place where Nello was was nearer to Randolph than to themselves, and that he might get there that night if he was informed at once, and give them news, at least let them know whether Liliás had reached the house where her brother was. "And I will go by the first train," Mr. Pen said timidly. "Let me go, as I have had a hand in it. John knows I could not mean any harm to his boy——."

Nobody had meant any harm, but the fact that the two children were both gone, and one, a girl like Liliás, wandering by herself no one knew where, was as bad as if they had meant it a hundred times over. Who could it be who had beguiled her with this story of Nello's trouble? If John, who had suffered so much, and who had come from the country where feuds and vengeance still flourish, suspected an enemy in it, suspected even his brother who had never been his friend, who could wonder? They telegraphed to Randolph, and to Mr. Swan, and to the stations on the way, John himself hurrying to Pennington to do so. And then when all this was done, which made an exciting bustle for a moment, there was nothing further possible but to wait till evening for the train. Such pauses are due to the very speed and superior possibilities of modern life. A post-chaise was slower than the railway, but it could be had at once, and those long and dreary hours of delay, of time which one feels to be lost, and in which while we wait, anything fatal may happen, are the reverse side of the

medal, the attendant disadvantage upon headlong speed and annihilation of distance. What a miserable house it was during all that eternal day! Anxieties of every kind filled their minds—those which concerned life and the living coming uppermost and shutting out the solemn interest of the chamber over which death had been hovering. The Squire slept, but only his nurse, unmoved in professional calm, watched over him; and when he woke, still wrapped in a mist and haze of half-consciousness which subdued all his being, yet with an aspect less deathlike, Mary came and went to and from his room, in an enforced stillness almost beyond bearing, not daring to stay long in one place lest she should betray herself. She dared not allow herself to think of little Lilius, perhaps in evil hands, perhaps wandering alone. Her little Lily! Mary felt it would be impossible to sit still, impossible to endure at all if she did not thrust away this thought. A little woman-child, at that tender age, too young for self-protection, too old for absolute impunity from harm. Mary clasped her hands tightly together and forced her thoughts into another channel. There was no lack indeed of other channels for her anxieties; her father thus lying between life and death, and her brother with all the penalties of old on his head, going and coming without concealment, without even an attempt to disguise himself. It would have been better even for John, Mary felt instinctively, if the Squire had been visibly dying instead of rallying. What if he should wake again to full consciousness, and order the doors of his house to be closed against his son as he had done before? What if, seeing this, and seeing him there without attempt

at concealment, rejected by his own family, the old prosecution should be revived and John taken? After that—But Mary shuddered and dropped this thread of thought also. The other, even the other was less terrible. Thus passed this miserable day.

Randolph had been alarmed even before the family were, though in a different fashion. Almost as soon as he had seated himself at his respectable clergymanly breakfast-table, after prayers and all due offices of the morning, a telegram was put into his hand. This made his pulse beat quicker, and he called to his wife to listen, while a whole phantasmagoria of possibilities seemed to rise like a haze about the yellow envelope, ugliest of inclosures. What could it be but his father's death that was thus intimated to him—an event which must have such important issues? When he had read it, however, he threw it on the table with an impatient "Pshaw! The little boy, always the little boy," he cried; "I think that little boy will be the death of me." Mrs. Randolph, who had heard of this child as the most troublesome of children, gave all her sympathy to her husband, and he contented himself with another message back again, saying that he had no doubt Mr. Swan would soon find the little fugitive, who had not come to him as the schoolmaster supposed. The day, however, which had begun thus in excitement, soon had other incidents to make it memorable. Early in the afternoon other telegrams came. The one he first opened was from Mr. Pen; this at least must be what he hoped for. But instead of telling of the Squire's death, Mr. Pen telegraphed to him an entreaty which he could not understand. "Lilias is missing too—for God's sake go at once to

the school and ascertain if she is there." What did he mean—what did the old fool mean?

"Here is another, Randolph," said his wife, composing her face into solemnity. "I fear—I fear this at least must be bad news from the Castle."

In the heat of his disappointment and impatience Randolph was as nearly as possible exclaiming in over-sincerity, "Fear!—I hope it is, with all my heart." But when he opened it he stood aghast; his brother's name stared him in the face—"John Musgrave." How came it there—that outlawed name? It filled him with such a hurry and ferment of agitation that he cared nothing what the message was; he let it drop and looked up aghast in his wife's face.

"Is it so?" she said, assuming the very tone, the right voice with which a clergyman's wife ought to speak of a death. "Alas, my poor dear husband, is it so? is he gone indeed?"

But Randolph forgot that he was a clergyman and all proprieties. He threw down the hideous bit of paper and jumped to his feet and paced about the room in his excitement. "He has come, confound him!" he cried.

Not gone! that would have been nothing but good news—but this was bad indeed, something unthought of, never calculated upon; worse than any misgiving he had ever entertained. He had been uneasy about the child, the boy whom everybody would assume to be the heir: but John—that John should return—that he should be there before his father died—this combination was beyond all his fears.

After he had got over the first shock he took up the telegram to see what it was that "John Musgrave,

Penninghame Castle,"—the name written out in full letters, almost with ostentation, no concealing or disguising of it, though it was a name lying under the utmost penalties of the law—had to say to him.

"My little daughter has been decoyed away under pretence that her brother was in danger. You can reach the place to-day. I cannot. Will you serve me for once, and go and telegraph if she is safe?" This was the communication. Randolph's breast swelled high with what he felt to be natural indignation. "I serve him! I go a hundred miles or so for his convenience! I will see him—hanged first!" Hanged—yes, that was what would happen to the fellow if he were caught, if everybody were not so weakly indulgent, so ready to defeat the law. And this was the man who ventured to bid his brother "serve him for once," treating him, Randolph, a clergyman, a person irreproachable, in this cavalier fashion. What had he to do with it if the little girl had been decoyed away? No doubt the little monkey, if all were known, was ready enough to go. He hoped in his heart they were both gone together, and would never be heard of more.

When he came as far as this, however, Randolph pulled himself up short. After all, he was not a bad man to rejoice in the afflictions of his neighbours; he only wished them out of his way, he did not wish any harm to them; and he felt that what he had just said in his heart was wicked, and might bring down a "judgment." To come the length of a wish that your neighbour may not thrive is a thing that no respectable person should allow himself to do; a little grudging of your neighbour's prosperity, a little secret satis-

faction in his trouble, is a different matter,—but, articulately to wish him harm! This brought him to himself and made him aware of his wife's eyes fixed upon him with some anxiety. She was a gentle little believing sort of woman, without any brains to speak of, and she thought dear Randolph's feelings had been too much for him. Her eyes were fixed on him with devout sympathy. How much feeling he had, though he did not speak much of it; what strong affections he had! Randolph paused a little to calm himself down. These all-trusting women are sometimes an exasperation unspeakable in their innocence, but still, on the other hand, a man must often make an effort not to dispel such belief. He said, "No, my dear, it is not what I thought; my father is not dead, but suffering, which is almost worse; and my brother whom you have heard of—who has been such a grief to us all—has come home unexpectedly."

"Oh, Randolph!" The innocent wife went to him and took his hand and caressed it. "How hard upon you! How much for you to bear! Two such troubles at once."

"Yes, indeed," he said, accepting her sympathy, "and the little boy whom I told you of, whom I took to school,—well, he has run away——"

"Oh, Randolph dear, what mountains of anxiety upon you!"

"You may say so. I must go, I suppose, and look after this little wretch. Put me up something in the little portmanteau—and from thence I suppose I had better go on to Penninghame again. Who knows what trouble may follow John's most ill-advised return?"

"And they all lean so on you," said the foolish

wife. Notwithstanding these dozen years of separation between him and his family, she was able to persuade herself of this, and that he was the prop and saviour of his race. There is nothing that foolish wives will not believe.

Randolph, however, wavered in his decision after he had made up his mind to go. Why should he go, putting himself to so much trouble at John's order? He changed his mind half a dozen times in succession. Finally, however, he did go, sending two messages back on his way, one to John, the other to Mr. Pen. To John he said: *I am alarmed beyond measure to see your name. Is it safe for you to be there? Know nothing about little girl, but hear that little boy has run away from school and am going to see.*" Thus he planted, or meant to plant, an additional sting in his brother's breast. And as he travelled along in the afternoon, going to see after Nello, his own exasperation and resentment became so hot within him, that when he arrived at the junction, he sent a message of a very different tenor to Mr. Pen. He did not perhaps quite know what he was doing. He was furious with disappointment and annoyance and confusion, feeling himself cheated, thrust aside, put out of the place which he ought to have filled. Nello would have had harsh justice had he been brought before him at such a moment. "Little troublesome, effeminate baby, good for nothing, and now to be ruined in every way. But I wash my hands of him," Randolph said.

CHAPTER XV.

Another Helper.

ON that same morning when so many things occurred, young Lord Stanton was seated in the library at Stanton, with a great deal of business to do. He had letters to write, he had the accounts of his agent to look over, and a hundred other very pressing matters which demanded his close attention. Perhaps it was only natural in these circumstances that Geoff should be unusually idle, and not at all disposed to tackle to his work. Generally he was so much interested in what was real work that he did it heartily, glad of the honest compulsion; but on this morning he was unsettled, and not in his usual mood of industry. He watched the leaves dropping from the trees outside, he listened idly to the sounds within; he scribbled on the margin of his accounts, now a bit of Latin verse (for Mr. Tritton was an elegant scholar), now a grotesque face, anything but the steady calculations he ought to have made. Now and then a sudden recollection of something he had read would cross his mind, when he would get up in the middle of a letter to seek the book in which he thought it was and verify his recollection on the spot, a thing he would not have taken the trouble to do had that floating recollection had any connection with the work in which he professed to be engaged. In short, he was entirely idle, distracted, and *desœuvré*. Mr. Tritton was reading to

Lady Stanton in her morning room. It was early; the household were all busy and occupied,—all except the young master of it, who could not settle to his work.

He was sitting thus when his easily distracted attention was caught by a movement outside, not like anything that could be made by bird or dog, the only two living creatures likely to be there so close to his window. It was the same window through which he had gone out the evening he made his night expedition to the hills. The sound caught his attention, as anything would have done that gave him an excuse for raising his head from the letters he was now trying to write, having given up the accounts in despair. When he saw a shadow skirt the grass, Geoff watched with eager interest for what would follow—then there was a pause, and he had bent over the letter again, thinking it a mere trick of fancy, when a sound close to him made him start and look up. Some one was standing with his back to the morning light—standing across the window-sill with one foot within the room. Geoff started to his feet with momentary alarm. "Who are you? Ah! is it Bampfylde?" he said.

"Just me, my young lord. May I come in and speak a word?"

"Certainly—come in. But why not go to the front door and come in like any one else? You do not suppose I should have shut my doors on *you*?"

"Maybe, no; but I'm not a visitor for the like of you. I'm little credit about a grand house. I've not come here for nothing now, but to ask you a service."

"What is it, Bampfylde? If I can do anything for you I will."

"It's not exactly for me, but you can do it if you

will, my young lord. It's something I'm hindered from doing. It's for the young ones at the Castle, that you know of. Both the bairns are in trouble, so far as I can judge. I gave the little boy a carrier to let off if he wanted help. Me, and still more the old woman, we misdoubted that brother. And nigh a week ago the carrier came home, but I was away on—on a hard job, that I'm on still, and she did not understand. And when I saw her and told her yesterday what the sign was, what does the old woman do but tell the little lady—the little miss—and so far as I can hear *she's* away, the creature herself, a flower of a thing, no bigger than my arm, the very image of our Lily: her—that atom—she's away to deliver her brother, my young lord," said the vagrant, leaning against the window. "I'm most worn out by the same sort o' work. There's far too much of that been done among us one way and another, and *she's* away now on the same errand—to save her brother. It's laughable if you think on't," he said, with a curious gurgle in his throat of forlorn ridicule.

Geoff, who had leaned forward at the name of the children, saw that Bampfylde was very pale and worn, his clothes in less order than usual, and an air of utter weariness and harassment about him. He looked like a man who had not slept or undressed for days.

"Has anything new happened?" Geoff asked hurriedly. "Of course I will do whatever I can for the children—but tell me first—has anything happened with you?"

"Ay, plenty," said the rough fellow with a great sigh, which was not sentiment but fatigue. "If that will not vex you, my young lord, saving your presence,

I'll sit down and rest my bones while I talk to you, for I'm near dead with tiredness. *He's* given us the slip—I cannot tell you how. Many a fear we've had, but this time it's come true. Tuesday was a week he got away, the day after I'd been to see about the little lad. We thought he was but hanging about the fells in corners that none but him and me know, as he once did before, and I got him back. But it's worse than that. Lord! there's many an honest man lost on the fells in the mists, that has a wife and bairns looking to him. Would it not be more natural to take the likes of him, and let the father of a family go free? I cannot touch him, but there's no law to bind the Almighty. But all that's little to the purpose. He's loose ranging about the country and me on his heels. I've all but had him three or four times, but he's aye given me the slip."

"But this is terrible; it is a danger for the whole country," said Geoff. "The children!" The young man shuddered, he did not realize that the children were at a distance. He thought of nothing more than perhaps an expedition among the fells for Liliash—and what if she should fall into the madman's hands? "You should have help—you should rouse the country," he said.

"I'll no do that. Please God I'll get him yet, and this will be the end," said Bampfylde solemnly. "She cannot make up her mind to it even now. She's infatuate with him. I thought it would have ended when you put your hand into the web, my young lord."

"It is my fault," said Geoff. "I should have done something more; but then Mr. Musgrave fell ill, and I

have been waiting. If he dies, everything must be gone into. I was but waiting."

"I am not blaming you. She cannot bide to hear a word, and so she's been all this long time. Now and then her heart will speak for the others—they that suffer and have suffered—but it aye goes back to him. And I don't blame her neither," said Bampfylde. "It's aye her son to her, that was a gentleman and her pride." He had placed himself not on the comfortable chair which Geoff had pushed forward for him, but on the hard seat formed by the library steps, where he sat with his elbows on his knees, and his head supported in his hands, thus reposing himself upon himself. "It's good to rest," he said, with something of the garrulousness of weakness, glad in his exhaustion to stretch himself out, as it were, body and soul, and ease his mind after long silence. He almost forgot even his mission in the charm of this momentary repose. "Poor woman!" he added, pathetically; "I've never blamed her. This was her one pride, and how it has ended—if it were but ended! No," he went on after a pause, "please God there will be no harm. He's no murdering-mad, like some poor criminals that have done less harm than him. It's the solitary places he flees to, not the haunts o' men; we're brothers so far as that's counting. And I drop a word of warning as I go. I tell the folks that I hear there's a poor creature ranging the country that is bereft of his senses, and a man after him. I'm the man," said Bampfylde, with a low laugh, "but I tell nobody that; and oh the dance he's led me!" Then rousing himself with an effort, "But I'm losing time, and you're losing time, my young lord. If you would be a help to them you should be away

Get out your horse or your trap to take you to the train."

"Where has she gone—by the train?"

"Ay—and a long road. She's away there last night, the atom, all by herself. That's our blood," said Bampfylde, with again the low laugh, which was near tears. "But I need not say our blood neither, for her father has suffered the most of all, poor gentleman—the most of all! Look here, my young lord," he said, suddenly rising up, "if I sit there longer I'll go to sleep, and forget everything; and we've no time for sleep, neither you nor me. Here's the place. There's a train at half-past eleven that gets there before dark. You cannot get back to-night; you'll have to leave word that you cannot get back to-night. And go now; go, for the love of God!"

Geoff did not hesitate; he rang the bell hastily, and ordered his dog-cart to be ready at once, and wrote two or three lines of explanation to his mother. And he ordered the servant, who stared at his strange companion, to bring some food and wine. But Bampfylde shook his head. "Not so," he said; "not so. Bit nor sup I could not take here. We that once made this house desolate, it's not for us to eat in it or drink in it. You're o'er good, o'er good, my young lord; but I'll not forget the offer," he added, the water rushing to his eyes. He stood in front of the light, stretching his long limbs in the languor of exhaustion, a smile upon his face.

"You have overdone yourself, Bampfylde. You are not fit for any more exertion. What more can you do than you have done? I'll send out all the men about the house, and——"

"Nay, but I'll go to the last—as long as I can crawl. Mind you the young ones," he said; "and for all you're doing, and for your good heart, God bless you, my young lord!"

It seemed to Geoff like a dream when he found himself standing alone in the silent room among his books, with neither sight nor sound of any one near. Bampfylde disappeared as he had come, in a moment, vanishing among the shrubberies; and the young man found himself charged with a commission he did not understand, with a piece of dirty paper in his hand, upon which an address was rudely scrawled. What was he to do at this school, a day's journey off, about which he knew nothing? He would have laughed at the wild errand had he not been too deeply impressed by his visitor's appearance and manner to be amused by anything thus suggested. But wild as it was, Geoff was resolved to carry it out. Even the vaguest intimation of danger to Lillas would have sufficed to rouse him, but he had scarcely taken that thought into his mind. He could think of nothing but Bampfylde, and this with a pang of sympathy and interest which he could scarcely explain to himself. As he drove along towards the Stanton station, the first from Pennington, his mind was entirely occupied with this rough fellow. Something tragic about him, in his exhaustion, in the *effusion* of his weakness, had gone to Geoff's heart. He looked eagerly for traces of him—behind every bush, in every cross road. And to increase his anxiety, the servant who accompanied him began to entertain him with accounts of a madman who had escaped from an asylum, and who kept the country in alarm. "Has he been seen anywhere? has he harmed any one?" Geoff

asked, eagerly. But there were no details to be had; nothing but the general statement. Geoff gave the man orders to warn the game-keepers and out-door servants, and to have him secured if possible. It was scarcely loyal perhaps to poor Bampfylde, who had trusted him. Thus he had no thought but Bampfylde in his mind when he found himself in the train, rushing along on the errand he did not understand. It was a quick train, the one express of the day; and even at the junction there were only a few minutes to wait: very unlike the vigil that poor little Lillas had held there in the middle of night under the dreary flickering of the lamp. Geoff knew nothing of this; but by dint of thinking he had evolved something like a just idea of the errand on which he was going. Lillas had been warned that her brother was not happy, and had gone like a little Quixote to relieve him. Geoff could even form an idea to himself of the pre-occupation of the house with the Squire's illness, which would close all ears to Lillas' appeal about Nello's fancied unhappiness. Little nuisance! Geoff himself felt disposed to say—thinking any unhappiness that could happen to Nello of much less importance than the risk of Lillas. But he had not, of course, the least idea of Nello's flight. He arrived at the station about five o'clock in the afternoon, adding another bewilderment to the solitary official there, who had been telegraphed to from Penninghame, and already that day had been favoured by two interviews with Mr. Swan. "A young lady? I wish all young ladies were——Here's a message about her; and the schoolmaster, he's been at me, till I am sick of my life. What young lady could there be here? Do you think I'm a-hiding of her?" he cried

with that instinctive suspicion of being held responsible which is so strong in his class. Geoff, however, elicited by degrees all that there was to find out, and discovered at the same time that the matter was much more serious than he supposed. The little boy had run away from school; the little girl, evidently coming to meet him, had disappeared with him. It was supposed that they must have made for the railway, as the woman in the cottage close by had confessed to having given them breakfast; but they had disappeared from her ken, so that she half thought they had been ghost-children, with no reality in them; and though the country had been scoured everywhere, neither they, nor any trace of them, were to be found.

This was the altogether unsatisfactory ground upon which Geoff had to work,—and at five o'clock on an October afternoon there is but little time for detailed investigation of a country. His eye turned, as that of Lillas had done, to the wood. It was the place in which she would naturally take refuge. Had the wood been examined? he asked. Yes, every corner of it, Geoff was at his wits' end, and did not know what to do; he went down the road where Lillas had gone in the morning and talked to the woman, who told him a moving story of the tired pair, and declared that she would not have let them go, seeing very well that they were a little lady and gentleman, but that they had stolen away when her back was turned. Geoff stood at the cottage door gazing round him, when he saw something that no one else had noticed, a small matter enough. Caught upon the hedge, which reached close to the cottage, there was a shred of blue—the merest rag, a few threads, nothing more—such an almost in-

visible indication as a savage might leave to enable his companions to track him—a thing that could be seen only by instructed eyes. Geoff's eyes were inexperienced, but they were keen; and he knew the colour of Liliass' dress, which the other searchers were not aware of. He disentangled the threads carefully from the twig. One long hair, and that too was Liliass' colour, had caught on the same thorn. This seemed to him a trace unmistakable, notwithstanding that the woman of the cottage immediately claimed it. "Dear, I did not know that I had torn my best blue dress," she said, with genuine alarm. Geoff, however, left her abruptly, and followed out his clue. He hastened by the footpath behind the hedge towards the wood. It was the natural place for Liliass to be. By this time the young man had forgotten everything except the girl, who was at once a little child appealing to all his tenderest sympathies, and a little visionary princess to whom he had vowed himself. She was both in the combination of the moment—a tired child whom he could almost carry away in his arms, who would not be afraid of him, or shrink from these brotherly arms; but, at the same time, the little mother-woman, the defender and protector of one more helpless than herself. Geoff's heart swelled with a kind of heavenly enthusiasm and love. Never could there have been a purer passion. He hurried through the wood and through the wood, searching in all its glades and dells, peering into the very hollows of the old trees. There was nothing: Was there nothing? Not a movement, not a sound, except the birds chirping, the rush of a rabbit or squirrel, the flutter of the leaves in the evening air. For it was evening by this time, that could

not be denied; the last, long, slant rays of the sun were sloping along the trunks and roots of the trees, and the mossy greenness that covered them. The day was over in which a man could work, and night—night that would chill the children to the heart, and drive them wild with fear—desolate, dark night, full of visionary terrors, and also real dangers, was coming. Geoff had made up his mind certainly that they were there. He did not think of a magician's cave or a hermit's cell, as Liliast had done, but only whether there was some little hut anywhere, where they could have found refuge,—a hollow, unknown to him, where they might have hid themselves, not knowing a friend was near. The sun had lit up an illumination in the west, and shone through the red and yellow leaves with reflections of colour softer and more varying, but still more brilliant, than their own. The world seemed all ablaze between the two, with crimson and gold—autumn sun above, autumn foliage below. Then tone by tone and colour by colour died out from the skies, and the soft yet cold grey of the evening took possession of all. The paths of the wood seemed to grow ghostly in the gathering dusk, the colour stole out of the trees, the very sky seemed to drop lower as the night gathered in. Geoff walked about in a kind of despair. He called them, but there came no answer; he seemed to himself to poke into every corner, into the damp depths where the cold dew seemed to ooze out from the ground weighing down every leaflet. He was sure they were there. Must they spend the night in the dark, and be frozen and frightened to death before the morning? Geoff's heart was full of anxiety and pity. It seemed to him that he must stay there to

keep them company, whether he could find them or not.

Then all at once he heard a sound like a low sob. It seemed to come from the ground, close to where he was standing, but he could see nothing but a little tangle of wild brambles, long branches with still a solitary berry here and there, the leaves scanty, scarlet and brown with the frost. They were all clustered about the trunk of a big tree, a little thicket, prickly and impregnable, but close to the path. And was it the breathing of the night air only, or some wild creature in the brushwood, or human respiration that came soft, almost indistinguishable in the soft murmur of the wood? He stood still, scarcely venturing himself to breathe, so intent was he to listen; and by and by he heard the sound again. A child's sob, the soft pathetic reverberation of a sob, such as continues to come after the weeping is over. With trembling eagerness, yet caution, Geoff put aside the long tangles of the bramble which fell in a kind of arch. It was a hard piece of work, and had to be done with caution not to disturb the poor little nestlings, if nestlings there were. There Geoff disclosed to the waning light the prettiest pathetic picture. It was not the same green hollow in which the children had first taken refuge. They had been roused by the sound of passengers through the wood, and the voices of the people who were searching for themselves, and had woke up in fright. When these noises ceased they had strayed deeper into the wood to another and safer shelter, Nello being too frightened and miserable to go on as Lillas wished. At last they had found this refuge under the bramble bushes where nobody surely could

ever find them, meaning to lie there all day and creep out at night to continue their journey. Lillas had seated herself first, spreading out her skirt to protect her brother from the damp. There lying with his head and shoulders supported on her lap, he had gone to sleep again, while Lillas waked and pondered; very anxious, frightened too, and dissatisfied with the loss of time, she sat erect, supporting Nello, and gazed up at the dark figure in the twilight with alarmed eyes, which seemed to grow larger and larger as they shone in a passion of terror through the long tangles of the bush. Lillas had covered her brother with her shawl—she drew it over him now, covering the white little face on her arm, “What do you want with me? I am only resting. There is no one here to do any harm,” she said, with the sob coming again in spite of her. She thought it was the cruel schoolmaster, the more cruel uncle, who had condemned Nello to so many sufferings. She held her arms over him, protecting him—resolute not to let him be taken from her. “Oh, do not meddle with me!” she went on, growing more and more desperate. “I have some money I will give you, if you will only—only leave me alone. There is nobody—but me.”

Oh that sob! if she could only swallow it down and talk to him, this robber chief, this Robin Hood, as if she were not afraid! for sometimes these men are kind and do not hurt the weak. Lillas gazed, nothing but her eyes appearing, glowing through the gathering shade: then suddenly threw her brother off her lap in a transport of wild delight. “Oh Nello, Nello, Nello!” she cried, till the wood rang, “it is Mr. Geoff!”

CHAPTER XVI.

The Beginning of the End.

GEOFF took the children home without let or hindrance. There was no inn near where they could pass the night; and as he had no legitimate right to their custody, and was totally unknown and very young, and might not awaken any lively faith in the bosom of authority as against the schoolmaster or the uncle, he thought it wisest to take them away at once. He managed to get some simplest food for them with difficulty—a little bread and milk—and made them lie down propped amid the cushions of a first-class carriage, which was to be hooked on to the evening train when it arrived. Before they left the little station he had the satisfaction of seeing Randolph Musgrave arrive, looking sour and sullen. Geoff did not know that Randolph had done anything unkind to the children. Certainly it was none of his fault that Lilius was there; but what good partizan ever entered too closely into an examination of the actual rights and wrongs of a question? Randolph might have been innocent—as indeed he was—of any downright evil intention; but this availed him nothing. Geoff looked out of the window of his own carriage as they glided away from the station, and gazed with intensest school-boy pleasure on the glum and sour countenance of the churlish uncle, who, but for his own intervention,

might have wrought destruction to those new babes in the wood. He shivered when he thought of the two helpless creatures lying under the brambles too frightened to move, and feeling to their hearts all the fantastic horrors of the darkness. Now, though still in movement, and undergoing still further fatigue, the absolute rest which had fallen upon their childish spirits from the mere fact that he was there, touched the young man to the heart. They were willing to let him take them anywhere; their cares were over. Nello had even made a feeble little attempt to shake his draggled plumes and swagger a little, sore and uncomfortable though he was, before he clambered into the carriage; and Liliás lay in the nest he had made for her, looking out with eyes of measureless content—so changed from those great, wistful, unfathomable oceans of anxiety and fear which had looked at him through the brambles! She put her hand into his as he settled himself in his corner beside her—the little soft child's hand, which he warmed in his strong clasp, and which clung to him with a hold which did not relax even in her dreams; for she went to sleep so, holding him fast, feeling the sense of safety glow over her in delicious warmth and ease. Through all the night, even when she slept, at every movement he made, her soft fingers closed more firmly upon his hand. It was the child's anchor of safety; and this clinging, conscious and unconscious, went straight to Geoff's heart. In the dark, under the waning light of the lamp overhead, he watched the little face sinking into sleep, with now a faint little smile upon it—a complete relaxation of all the strained muscles—with a sensation of happiness which was beyond words.

Sometimes, for the mere pleasure of it he would make a movement wantonly to feel the renewed clasp of the little hand and see the drowsy opening of the eyes. "Are you there, Mr. Geoff?" she said now and then, with a voice as soft (he thought) as the coo of a dove. "Yes, my Lily;" he would say, with his heart swelling in his young bosom; and Liliás would drop to sleep again, smiling at him, with sleepy eyes, in what ease and infinite content! As for Nello, he snored now and then out of very satisfaction and slumbering confidence; little snores, something between a little cherub's trumpet and the native utterance of the tenderest of little pigs—at that age when even little piggies, by reason of babyhood, have something cherubic about them too.

At midnight, at the great junction, a tall, sunburnt, anxious-faced man walked along the line of carriages, looking in with eager look. "Are these your children?" he said to Geoff, seeing the two little figures laid up among the cushions, and not remarking how young their companion was. He spoke abruptly, but taking off his hat with an apologetic grace, which Geoff thought "foreign," as we are all so apt to suppose unusual courtesy to be. A sudden inspiration seized the young man. He did not know who this was, but somehow he never doubted who it was the stranger sought. "They are the little Musgraves of Penninghame," he said, simply, "whom I am taking home."

The tall stranger wavered for a moment, as though he might have fallen; then, in a voice half-choked, he asked, "May I come beside you?" He sat down in the seat opposite to Geoff. After an anxious inspection of the two little faces, now settled into profound

sleep, "Thank God!" he said. "They are all I have in the world."

Who could it be? Geoff's ears seemed to tingle with the words—"all I have in the world." He sat in his dark corner and gazed at this strange new-comer, who was more in the light. And the new-comer gazed at him. Seeing, after a while, the child's hand clasped in his—a mark of trust which sweet as it was, kept young Geoff in a somewhat forced attitude not comfortable for a long night journey, "I do not know you," he said, "but my little girl seems to put her whole trust in you, and that must make me your grateful servant too."

"Then you are John Musgrave?" cried the young man. "Oh, sir, I am glad—most glad, that you have come home! Yes, I think she likes me; and child or woman," cried young Geoff, clasping the little hand close with a sudden *effusion*, "I shall never care for any one else."

Serious, careworn, in peril of his life, John Musgrave laughed softly in his beard. "This is my first welcome home," he said.

Geoff found a carriage waiting for him at Stanton. His first impulse having been to take the children to his mother, he gave them up now with a pang, having first witnessed the surprise of incredulous delight with which Lillas flung herself at her waking upon her father. The cry with which she hailed him, the illumination of her face, and, Geoff felt, her utter forgetfulness of his own claims, half-vexed the young man after his uncomfortable night; and it was with a certain pang that he gave the children up to their natural guardian. "Papa, this is Mr. Geoff," Lillas said; "no

one has ever been so kind; and he knows about you something that nobody else knows."

John Musgrave looked up with a gleam of surprise and a faint suffusion of colour on his serious face. "Every one here knows about *me*," he said, with a sigh; and then he turned to the young guardian of his children. "Lily's introduction is of the slightest," he said. "I don't know you, nor how you have been made to take so much interest in them—how you knew even that they wanted help; but I am grateful to you with all my heart, all the same."

"I am Geoffrey Stanton," said the young man. He did not know how to make the announcement, but coloured high with consciousness of the pain that must be associated with his name. But it was best, he felt, to make the revelation at once. "The brother of Walter Stanton, whom ——. As Liliass says, sir, I know more about you than others know. I have heard everything."

John Musgrave shook his head. "Everything! till death steps in to one or another of the people concerned, that is what no one will ever know; but so long as you do not shrink from me, Lord Stanton—— You are Lord Stanton; is it not so?"

"I am not making any idle brag," said Geoff. "I know *everything*. It was Bampfylde himself—Dick Bampfylde himself—who sent me after the children. I know the truth of it all, and I am ready to stand by you, sir, whenever and howsoever you want me——"

Geoff bent forward eagerly, holding out his hand, with a flush of earnestness and enthusiasm on his young face. Musgrave looked at him with great and serious surprise. His face darkened and lighted up,

and he started slightly at the name of Bampfylde. At last, with a moment's hesitation, he took Geoff's outstretched hand, and pressed it warmly. "I dare not ask what it is you do know," he said, "but there is nothing on my hand to keep me from taking yours; and thank you a thousand times—thank you for *them*. About everything else we can talk hereafter."

In ten minutes after Geoff was whirling along the quiet country road on his way home. It was like a dream to him that all this should have happened since he last drove between those hedgerows, and he had the half-disappointed, half-injured feeling of one who has not carried out an adventure to its final end. He was worn out too, and excited, and he did not like giving up Lily into the hands of her father. Had it been Miss Musgrave he would have felt no difficulty. It was chilly in the early morning, and he buttoned up his coat to his chin, and put his hands in his pockets, and let his groom drive, who had evidently something to say to him which could scarcely be kept in till they got clear of the station. Geoff had seen it so distinctly in the man's face, that he had asked at once, "Is all right at home?" But he was too tired to pay much attention to anything beyond that. When they had gone on for about a quarter of an hour, the groom himself broke the silence. "I beg your pardon, my lord——"

"What is it?" Geoff, retired into the recesses of his big coat, had been half asleep.

Then the man began an excited story. He had heard a scuffle and a struggle at a point of the road which they were about approaching when on his way to meet his master. Wild cries "not like a human

being," he said, and the sound of a violent encounter. "I thought of the madman I was telling your lordship of yesterday." "And what was it?" cried Geoff, rousing up to instant interest; upon which the groom became apologetic.

"How could I leave my horse, my lord?—a young beast, very fresh, as your lordship knows. He'd have bolted if I'd have left him for a moment. It was all I could do, as it was, to hold him in with such cries in his ears. I sent on the first man I met. A man does not grapple with a madman unless he is obliged to——"

"But you sent the other man to do it," said Geoff, half-amused, half-angry. He sprang from the phaeton as they came to the spot which the groom pointed out. It was a little dell, the course of a streamlet, widening as it ascended, and clothed with trees. Geoff knew the spot well. About half a mile further up, on a little green plateau in the midst of the line of sheltering wood which covered these slopes, his brother's body had been found. He had been taken to see the spot with shuddering interest when he was a child, and had never forgotten the fatal place. The wood was very thick, with rank, dark, water-loving trees; and, whether it was fancy or reality, had always seemed to Geoff the most dismal spot in the county. All was quiet now, or so he thought at first. But there was no mistaking the evidence of wet, broken, and trampled grass, which showed where some deadly struggle had been. The spot was not far from the road—about five minutes of ascent, no more—and the young man pressed on, guided by signs of the fray, and in increasing anxiety; for almost at the first step

he saw an old game-pouch thrown on the ground, which he recognised as having been worn by Bampfylde. Presently he heard, a little in advance of him, a low groan, and the sound of a sympathetic voice. "Could you walk, with my arm to steady you? Will you try to walk, my man?" Another low moaning cry followed. "My walking's done in this world," said a feeble voice. Geoff hurried forward, stifling a cry of grief and pain. He had known it since he first set foot on that fatal slope. It was Bampfylde's voice; and presently he came in sight of the group. The sympathiser was the same labouring man, no doubt, whom his groom had sent to the rescue. Wild Bampfylde lay propped upon the mossy bank, his head supported upon a bush of heather. The stranger who stood by him had evidently washed the blood from his face and unbuttoned his shirt, which was open. There was a wound on his forehead, however, from which blood was slowly oozing, and his face was pallid as death. "Let me be—let me be," he said with a groan, as his kind helper tried to raise him. Then a faint glimmer of pleasure came over his ghastly face. "Ah, my young lord!" he said.

"What is it, Bampfylde? What has happened? Is he much hurt?" cried Geoff, kneeling down by his side. The man did not say anything, but shook his head. The vagrant himself smiled, with a kind of faint amusement in the mournful glimmer of his eyes.

"Not hurt, my young gentleman; just killed," he said; "but you're back—and they're safe?"

"Safe, Bampfylde; and listen!—with their father. He has come to take care of his own."

A warmer gleam lighted up the vagrant's face.

"John Musgrave here! Ah, but it's well timed," he cried feebly. "My young lord, I'm grieved but for one thing,—the old woman. Who will take care of old 'Lizabeth? and she's been a good woman—if it had not been her son that went between her and her wits. I'm sorry for her, poor old body; very, very sorry for her, poor 'Lizabeth. He'll never be taken now, my young lord. Now he's killed me, there's none will ever take him. And so we'll all be ended, and the old woman left to die, without one—without one——!"

"My cart is at the foot of the hill," said Geoff, quickly, addressing the labourer, who stood by with tears in his eyes; "take it, and bid the groom drive as fast as the horse will go—and he's fresh—for the first doctor you can find; and bid them send an easy carriage from Stanton—quick! For every moment you save I'll give you——"

"I want no giving. What a man can do for poor Dick Bampfylde, I will," cried the other as he rushed down the slope. The vagrant smiled feebly again.

"They're all good-hearted," he said. "Not one of them but would do poor Dick Bampfylde a good turn; that's a pleasure, my young lord. And you—you're the best of all. Ay, let him go, it'll please you; but me, my hour's come."

"Bampfylde, does it hurt you to speak? Can you tell me how it was?"

The poor fellow's eyes were glazing over. He made an effort, when Geoff's voice caught him, as it were, and arrested the stupor. "Eh, my young lord? What needs to tell? Poor creature, he did not know

me for a friend, far less a brother. And madness is strong—it's strong. Tell the old woman that—it was not *me* he killed—but—one that tried to take him. Ay—we were all playing about the beck, and her calling us to come in—all the family; him and—Lily—and me. I was always the least account—but it was me that would aye be first to answer;—and now we are all coming home—Poor old 'Lizabeth—Eh! what were you saying, my young lord?"

"Bampfylde! has he got clean off again, after this? Where is he? Can you tell me—for the sake of others if not for your own?"

"For mine!—Would it mend me to tell upon him?—Nay, nay, you'll never take him—never now—but he'll die—like the rest of us—that is what puts things square, my young lord—death!—it settles all; you'll find him some place on the green turf—we were aye a family that liked the green grass underneath us—you'll find him—as peaceable as me."

"Oh, Bampfylde," cried Geoff, "keep up your courage a little, the men will come directly and carry you to Stanton."

"To carry me—to the kirkyard—that's my place; and put green turf over me—nothing but green turf. So long as you will be kind to old 'Lizabeth; she'll live—she's not the kind that dies—and not one of us to the fore! What did we do—we or our fathers?" said the vagrant solemnly. "But, oh, that's true, true—that's God's word: neither he did it nor his father's—but that the works of God might be manifest. Eh, but I cannot see—I cannot see how the work of God is in it. My eyes—there's not much good in my eyes now."

Geoff kneeled beside the dying man not knowing what to do or say. Should he speak to him of religion? Should he question him about his own hard fate, that they might bring it home to the culprit? But Bampfylde was not able for either of these subjects. He was wading in the vague and misty country which is between life and death. He threw out his arms in the languor and restlessness of dying, and one of them dropped so that the fingers dipped in the little brook. This brought another gleam of faint pleasure to his pallid face.

"Water—give me some—to drink," he murmured, moving his lips. And then, as Geoff brought it to him in the hollow of a leaf, the only thing he could think of, and moistened his lips and bathed his forehead, "Thank you, Lily," he said. "That's pleasant, oh, that's pleasant. And what was it brought you here—you here?—they're all safe, the young ones—thanks to——. Eh! it's not Lily—but I thought I saw Lily; it's you, my young lord?"

"Yes, I am here—lean on me, Bampfylde. What can I do for you, what can I do?" Geoff had never seen death, and he trembled with awe and solemn reverence, far more deeply moved than the dying vagrant, who was floating away on gentle waves of unconsciousness.

"Ay, Lily—d'ye hear her calling?—the house is dark, and the night's fine. But let's go to her—let's go; he was aye the last, though she likes him best." Bampfylde raised himself suddenly with a half convulsive movement. "Poor 'Lizabeth!—poor old 'Lizabeth—all gone—all gone!" he said.

And what an hour Geoff spent supporting the poor head, and moistening the dry lips of the man who was dead, yet could not die! He did not know there had been such struggles in the world.

CHAPTER XVII.

A Traitor.

MR. PENNITHORNE was at the Castle almost all the day during which so many things occurred. While the children wandered in the wood and young Lord Stanton went in search of them, the vicar could not leave the centre of anxiety. There was no possibility of going upon that quest till the evening, and good Mr. Pen thought it his bounden duty to stay with John to "take off his attention," to distract his mind if possible from the object of his anxieties. It was all John Musgrave could do, by way of consideration for an old friend, to put up with these attentions, but he managed to do so without betraying his impatience, and Mr. Pen thought he had performed the first duty of friendship. He suggested everything he could think of that might have happened; most of his suggestions going to prove that Liliast was in very great peril indeed, though she might be saved by various ingenious ways. And he took Mary aside and shook his head, and said he was afraid it was a very bad business. He believed, good man, that he was of the greatest use to them both, and congratulated himself on having stayed to discharge this Christian duty. But Mrs. Pen at the vicarage got cross and nervous, and did not think her husband was doing his duty to his home. When a telegram came in the afternoon, she was not only curious but frightened—

for telegrams she thought were always messages of evil. What could it tell but harm? Perhaps that her father had been taken ill (Mr. Pen himself had no family, nor anybody to speak of belonging to him); perhaps that the investment had gone wrong in which all their little money was. She tore it open in great agitation, and read as follows:—

“John Musgrave is in the county and near you. Do you remember what is your duty as a magistrate, and what is the penalty of not performing it?”

Mrs. Pen read this alarming missive two or three times over before she could understand what it meant. John Musgrave! By degrees it became clear to her. This was why her husband deserted her, and spent his whole day at the Castle. He a magistrate, whose first duty it was to send John Musgrave to prison. The penalty—what was the penalty? The poor woman was in such a frenzy of agitation and terror that she did not know what to believe. What could they do to him if it was found out? She went to the window and looked for him; she went out and walked to the garden gate; she was not able to keep still. The penalty—what was it? Could they put him in prison instead of the criminal he allowed to go free? That seemed the most natural thing, and imagination conjured up before her the dreadful scene of Mr. Pen's arrest, perhaps when he was going to church, perhaps when the house was full of people—everybody seeing—everybody knowing it. Mrs. Pen saw her husband dragged along the road in handcuffs before she came to an end of her imaginations. Was there nothing she could do to save him? She was ready to put herself in the breach, to say, like a heroine, “Take me, and let him go free?”

but it did not appear to her likely that the myrmidons of the law would pay any attention to such a touching interposition. Then it occurred to her to look who it was, a thing she had not noticed at first, who had sent this kind warning. But this alarmed her more and more. It was some one who called himself "Friend," who had taken the trouble, from a distant place in the midland counties, to telegraph thus to Mr. Pennithorne. A friend—it was then an anonymous warning, a very alarming thing indeed to the vulgar mind. Mrs. Pen worked herself up into a state of intense nervous agitation. She sent for the gardener that she might send him at once to the Castle for her husband. But before he came another train of reflections came across her mind. John Musgrave was her William's friend. He was devoted to the family generally, and to this member of it in particular. Was he not capable of going to prison—of letting himself be handcuffed and dragged along the public road, and cast into a dungeon, rather than give up his friend to justice? Oh, what could the poor woman do? If she could but take some step—do something to save him before he knew.

All at once there occurred to Mrs. Pen a plan of action which would put everything right—save William in spite of himself, and without his knowledge, and put John Musgrave in the hands of justice without any action of his which could be supposed unfriendly. She herself, Mrs. Pen, did not even know John, so that if she betrayed him it would be nothing unkind, nobody could blame her, not Mary Musgrave herself. When the gardener came, instead of sending him to the Castle for her husband, she sent him to the village to order the fly in which she occasionally paid visits; and she

put on her best clothes with a quiver of anxiety and terror in her heart. She put the telegram in her pocket, and drove away—with a half satisfaction in her own appearance and half pride in bidding the man drive to Elfdale, to Sir Henry Stanton's, mingling with the real anxiety in her heart. She was frightened too at what she was about to do—but nobody could expect from her any consideration for John Musgrave, whom she had never seen; whereas, to save her husband from the consequences of his foolish faithfulness, was not that the evident and first duty of a wife? It was a long drive, and she had many misgivings as she drove along, with plenty of time to consider and reconsider all the arguments she had already gone over; but yet when she got to Elfdale she did not seem to have had any time to think at all. She was hurried in, before she knew, to Sir Henry Stanton's presence. He was the nearest magistrate of any importance, and Mrs. Pen had a slight visiting acquaintance, of which she was very proud, with Lady Stanton. Had she repented at the last of her mission, she could always make out to herself that it was Lady Stanton she had come to visit. But it was Sir Henry whom she asked for, alarm for her husband at the last moment getting the better of her fears.

Sir Henry received her with a great deal of surprise. What could the little country clergyman's wife want with him? But he was still more surprised when he heard her errand. John Musgrave at home!—within reach—daring justice—defying the law! His wife had told him of some supposed discovery which she at least imagined likely to clear Musgrave, by bringing in another possible criminal, but that must be some merely

nonsensical theory he had no doubt, such as women and boys are apt to indulge:—for if anything could be worse than women, Sir Henry felt it was boys inspired by women, and carrying out their fancies. Therefore he had paid very little regard to what his wife said. Mrs. Pennithorne had the advantage of rousing him into excitement. What! come back!—daring justice to touch him—insulting the family of the man he had killed, and the laws of the country! Sir Henry fumed at the audacity, the evident absence of all remorse or compunction. “He must be a shameless, heartless ruffian,” he said; and then he looked at the harmless little woman who had brought him this news. “It is very public-spirited to bestir yourself in the matter,” he said. “Have you seen the man, Mrs. Pennithorne, or how have you come to know?”

“I have not seen him, Sir Henry. I don’t know anything about him, therefore nobody could say that it was unkind in *me*. How can you have any feeling for a person you never saw? I got—the news—to-day when my husband was at the Castle—he did not tell me—he has nothing to do with it. He is a great friend of the Musgraves, Sir Henry; and I was told if he knew and did not tell it would bring him into trouble; so I came to you. I thought it was a wife’s duty. I did not wait till he came in to show him the telegram, but I came straight on to you.”

“Then you got a telegram?”

“Did I say a telegram?” she said, frightened. “Oh—I did not think what I was saying. But why should I conceal it? Yes, indeed, Sir Henry, this afternoon there came a telegram. I have never had a moment’s peace since then. I thought at first I would send for

him and see what he would do, but then, I thought—he thinks so much of the Musgraves—no doubt it would be a trouble to him to go against them; and so I thought before he came in I would come to you. I would not do anything without consulting my husband in any ordinary way, indeed, I assure you, Sir Henry. I am not a woman of that kind; but in a thing that might have brought him into such trouble——”

“And is that telegram all you know, Mrs. Pennithorne?”

A horrible dread that he was going to disapprove of her, instead of commending her, ran through her mind.

“It is all,” she said, faltering; “I have it in my pocket.”

To show the telegram was the last thing in her mind, yet she produced it now in impetuous self-defence. Having made such a sacrifice as she had done, acted on her own authority, incurred the expense of the fly, absented herself from home without anybody’s knowledge (though William was far too much wrapped up in the Musgraves to be aware of that), it was more than Mrs. Pennithorne could bear to have her motives thus unappreciated. She held out the telegram without pausing to think. He took it, and read it, with a curious look on his face. Sir Henry took a low view of wives, and of women in general. If she belonged to him how he would put her down, this meddling woman! but he was glad to learn what she had to tell, and to be able to act upon it. To approve of your informant and to use the information obtained are two very different things.

“This is a threat,” he said; “this is a very curious

communication, Mrs. Pennithorne. Do you know who sent it? Friend! Is it a friend in the abstract, or does your husband know any one of the name?"

"I don't know who it is. Oh no, Sir Henry. William knows no one—no one whom I don't know! His friends are my friends. My husband is the best of men. He has not a secret from me. If I may seem to be acting behind his back it is only to save him, Sir Henry—only for his good."

"You are acting in the most public-spirited way, Mrs. Pennithorne; but it is very strange, and I wonder who could have sent it. Do you know any one at this place?"

"Nobody," she said, composing herself, yet not quite satisfied either, for public-spirited was but a poor sort of praise. She was conscious that she was betraying her husband as well as John Musgrave, and nothing but distinct applause and assurance that she had saved her William could have put her conscience quite at ease.

"It is very odd—very odd," he said; "but I am very much obliged to you for bringing this information to me, and I shall lose no time in acting upon it. For a long time, a very long time, this man has evaded the law; but it will not do to defy it—it never does to defy it. He shall find that it is more watchful than he thought."

"And, Sir Henry, of course it is of my husband I must think first. You will not say he knew? You will not let him get into trouble about it?—a clergyman, a man whom every one looks up to! You will save him from the penalty, Sir Henry? Indeed I have no reason

to believe he knew at all; he has never seen this thing. I don't suppose he knows at all. But he might be so easily got into trouble! Oh, Sir Henry! you will not let them bring in William's name?"

"I shall take care that Mr. Pennithorne is not mentioned at all," he said, with a polite bow; but he did not add, "You are a heroic woman and you have saved your husband," which was the thing poor Mrs. Pen wanted to support her. She put back her telegram in her pocket very humbly, and rose up, feeling herself more a culprit than a heroine to go away. At this moment Lady Stanton herself came in hurriedly.

"I heard Mrs. Pennithorne was here," she said, with a half apology to her husband, "and I thought I might come and ask what was the last news from Penninghame—if there was any change. I am not interrupting—business?"

"No; you will be interested in the news Mrs. Pennithorne brings me," said Sir Henry, with a certain satisfaction. "Mr. Musgrave's son John, in whom you have always shown so much interest, Walter Stanton's murderer——"

"No, no," she said, with a shudder, folding her hands instinctively; "no, no!" The colour went out of her very lips. She was about to hear that he had died. He must have died on the very day she saw him. She listened, looking at her husband all pale and awe-stricken, with a gasp in her throat.

—"Is here," said Sir Henry, deliberately. "Here, where it was done, defying the law."

Mary uttered a great cry of mingled relief and despair.

"Then it was he—it was he—and no ghost!" she cried.

"What! you knew and never told me? I am not so happy in my wife," said Sir Henry, with a threatening smile, "as Mr. Pennithorne."

"Oh, was it he—was it he?—no spirit—but himself? God help him," cried Lady Stanton, with sudden tears. "No, I could not have told you, for I thought it was an apparition. And I would not, Henry," she added with a kind of generous passion, "I would not if I could. How could I betray an innocent man?"

"Happily Mrs. Pennithorne has saved you the trouble," he said, getting up impatiently from his seat. He resented his wife's silence, but he scorned the other woman who had brought him the news. "Do not let me disturb you, ladies, but this is too important for delay. The warrant must be out to-night. I trust to your honour, or I might arrest you both," he said with a sneer—"two fair prisoners—lest you should warn the man and defeat justice again."

"Henry, you are not going to arrest him—to *arrest* him—after what I told you? I told you that Geoff——"

"Geoff! send Geoff to your nursery, to play with your children, Lady Stanton," he cried, in rising wrath, "rather than make a puppet of him to carry out your own ideas. I have had enough of boys' nonsense and women's. Go to your tea-table, my lady, and leave me to manage my own concerns."

Then Lady Stanton—was it not natural?—with a white, self-contained passion, turned upon the other commonplace woman by her side, who stood trembling

before the angry man, yet siding with him in her heart, as such women do.

"And is it you that have betrayed him?" she cried; "do you know that your husband owes everything to him—everything? Oh, it cannot be Mr. Pen's doing—he loved them all too well. If it is you, how will you bear to have his blood on your head? God knows what they may prove against him, or what they may do to him; but whatever it is, it will be a lie, and his blood will be on your head. Oh, how could you, a woman, betray an innocent man?"

Lady Stanton's passion, Sir Henry's lowering countenance, the sudden atmosphere of tragedy in which she found herself, were too much for poor Mrs. Pen. She burst into hysterical crying, and dropped down upon the floor between these two excited people. Perhaps it was as good a way as any other of extricating herself out of the most difficult position in which a poor little, well-intentioned clergywoman had ever been.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Mother.

THE afternoon of the day on which poor Bampfylde died was bright and fine, one of those beautiful October days which are more lovely in their wistful brightness, more touching, than any other period of the year—Summer still lingering, the smile on her lip and the tear in her eye, dressed out in borrowed splendour, her own fair garniture of flowers and greenery worn out, but wearing her Indian mantle with a tender grace, subdued and sweet. The late mignonette overblown, yet fragrant, was sweet in the little village gardens, underneath the pale China roses that still kept up a little glow of blossom. Something had excited the village; the people were at their doors, and gathered in groups about. Miss Price, the dressmaker, held a little court. There was evidently something to tell, something to talk over more than was usual. The few passengers who were about stayed to hear, and each little knot of people which had managed to secure a new listener was happy. They were all in full tide of talk, commenting upon and discussing some occurrence with a certain hush, at the same time, of awe about them, which showed that the news was not of a joyful character—when some one came down through the village whose appearance raised the excitement to fever point. It was the well-known figure of the old

woman in her grey cloak—so well known up the water and down the water, which thus suddenly appeared among them—old 'Lizabeth Bampfylde! The gossips shrank closer together, and gazed at her with eager curiosity all, with sympathy some. They drew away from her path with a feeling which was half reverence and half fear. "Does she know—do you think she knows?" some of them asked; and exclamations of "Poor old body—poor woman," were rife among the kind-hearted; but all under their breath. 'Lizabeth took no notice of the people in her path; perhaps she did not even see them. She was warm with her long walk from the fells, and had thrown off her hood and knotted her red handkerchief over her cap. She went along thus with the long swing of her still vigorous limbs, stately and self-absorbed. Whatever she knew, her mind was too much occupied to take any notice of the people in her way. She had walked far, and she had far to walk still. She went on steadily through the midst of them without a pause, looking neither to the right nor the left. There was a tragic directness in the very way she moved, going straight as a bird flies, at least as straight as the houses permitted, minding no windings of the road. The people in front of her stood back and whispered; the people behind closed upon her path. Did she know? Would she have had the fortitude to come walking down here all this long way had she known? Was she going to Stanton, where *they* were? Last of all, timidly, the people said among themselves, "Should not some one tell her?—some one should speak to her;" but by this time she had passed through the village, and they all felt with a sensation of relief that it was too late.

'Lizabeth walked on steadily along the water-side. It was a long way that she had still before her. She was going all the way down the water to Sir Henry Stanton's, as Mrs. Pennithorne had gone the day before. The walk was nothing to her, and the long silence of it was grateful to her mind. She knew nothing of what had happened on the other side of the lake. Up in her little house among the hills, all alone in the strange cessation of work, the dead leisure which seemed to have fallen upon her, she had thought of everything till her head and her heart ached alike. Everything now seemed to have gone wrong. Her daughter dead in exile, and her daughter's husband still a banished man, all for the sake of him who was roaming over the country, a fugitive escaped from her care. The life of her son Dick had been ruined by the same means. And now the cycle of misfortune was enlarging. The little boy, who was the heir of the Musgraves, was lost too, because he had no one to protect him—Lily's child; and the other Lily, the little lady whom she felt to be her own representative as well as Lily's, who could tell what would become of her? It seemed to 'Lizabeth that this child was the most precious of all. All the rest had suffered for the sake of her madman; but the second Lily, the little princess, who had sprung from her common stock, nothing must touch. Yet it cannot be said that it was for Lily's sake that she made up her mind at last; it was nothing so simple, it was a combination and complication of many motives. He was gone out of her hands who had been for years the absorbing occupation of her life. Dick was after him, it was true; but if Dick failed, how was he to be got without

public help? and that help could not be given until the whole story was told. Then her own loneliness wrought upon her, and all the whispers and echoes that circled about the cottage, when he was not there. Her son, ill-fated companion, the ruin of all who had any connection with him, absorbed her so much in general, that she had no time to survey the surroundings and think of all that was, and had been, and might be. Was it he after all that was the cause of all the suffering? What did he know of it? The story of Lily and of John Musgrave was a blank to him. He knew nothing of what they had suffered, was innocent of it in reality. Had he known, would he not have given himself up a hundred times rather than the innocent should suffer for him? Was it he, then, or his mother, who was the cause of all? Several times, during their long agony, such thoughts had overwhelmed 'Lizabeth's mind. They had come over her in full force when the children came to the Castle, and then it was that she had been brought to the length of revealing her secret to young Lord Stanton. Now everything was desperate about her; the little boy lost, the madman himself lost; no telling at any moment what misery and horror might come next. She thought this over day after day as the time passed, and no news came; waiting in the great loneliness, with her doors all open, that he might come in if some new impulse, or some touch of use and wont should lead him back, her ears intent to hear every sound; her mind prepared (she thought), for anything; fresh violence, perhaps violence to himself; miserable death, terrible discovery. She thought she heard his wild whoops and cries every time the wind raved among the hills; if a mountain

stream rushed down a little quicker than usual, swollen by the rain, over its pebbles, she thought it was his hurrying steps. It was always of him that her thoughts were, not of her other son who was pursuing the madman all about, subject to the same accidents, and who might perhaps be his victim instead of his captor. She never thought of that. But she was driven at last to a supreme resolution. Nobody could doubt his madness, could think it was a feint put on to escape punishment, now. And God, who was angry, might be propitiated if at last she made Him, though unwillingly, this sacrifice, this homage to justice and truth. This was the idea which finally prevailed in her mind. She would go and tell her story, and perhaps an angry God would accept, and restore the wanderer to her. If he were safe, safe even in prison, in some asylum, it would be better at least than his wild career of madness among all the dangers of the hills. She had risen in the morning from her uneasy bed, where she lay half-dressed, always watching, listening to every sound, with this determination upon her. She would propitiate God. She would do this thing she ought to have done so long ago. She did not deny that she ought to have done it, and now certainly she would do it, and God would be satisfied, and the tide of fate would turn.

All this struggle had not been without leaving traces upon her. Her ruddy colour, the colour of exposure as well as of health and vigour, was not altogether gone, but she was more brown than ruddy, and this partial paleness and the extreme gravity of her countenance added to the stately aspect she bore. She might have been a peasant-queen, as she moved along

with her steady, long, swinging footstep, able for any exertion, above fatigue or common weakness. A mile or two more or less, what did that matter? It did not occur to her to go to Mr. Pennithorne, though he was nearer, with her story. She went straight to Sir Henry Stanton. He had a family right to be the avenger of blood. It would be all the compensation that could be made to the Stantons, as well as a sacrifice propitiating God. And now that she had made up her mind there was no detail from which she shrank. 'Lizabeth never remarked the pitying and wondering looks which were cast upon her. She went on straight to her end with a sense of the solemnity and importance of her mission, which perhaps gave her a certain support. It was no light thing that she was about to do. That there was a certain commotion and agitation about Elfdale did not strike her in the excited state of her mind. It was natural that agitation should accompany her wherever she went. It harmonized with her mood, and seemed to her (unconsciously) a homage and respectful adhesion of nature to what she was about to do.

The great door was open, the hall empty, the way all clear to the room in which Sir Henry held his little court of justice. 'Lizabeth had come by instinct to the great hall door—a woman with such a tragical object does not steal in behind-backs or enter like one of the unconsidered poor. She went in unchallenged, seeing nobody except one of the girls, who peeped out from a door, and retreated again at sight of her. 'Lizabeth saw nothing strange in all this. She went in, more majestically, more slowly than ever, like a woman in a procession—a woman marching to the

stake. What stake, what burning could be so terrible? Two of the county police were at the open door; they looked at her with wondering awe, and let her pass. What could any one say to her? An army would have let her pass—*the mother!*—for they knew, though she did not know. 'Lizabeth saw but vaguely a number of people in the room—so much the better; let all hear who would hear. It would be so much the greater propitiation to an outraged heaven. She came in with a kind of dumb state about her, everybody giving way before her. "The mother!" they all said to each other with dismay, yet excitement. Some one brought her a chair with anxious and pitying looks. She put it away with a wave of her hand, yet made a little curtsy of acknowledgment in old-fashioned politeness. It never occurred to her mind to inquire why she was received with such obsequious attention. She advanced to the table at which Sir Henry sat. He too looked pityingly, kindly at her, not like his usual severity. God had prepared everything for her atonement—was it not an earnest of its acceptance that He should thus have put every obstacle out of her way?

"Sir Henry Stanton," she said, "I've come to make you acquaint with a story that all the country should have heard long ago. I've not had the courage to tell it till this moment when the Lord has given me strength. Bid them take pen and paper and put it all down in hand of write, and I'll set my name to it. It's to clear them that are innocent that I've come to speak, and to let it be known who was guilty; but it wasna him that was guilty—it wasna him—but the madness in him," she said, her voice breaking for a moment. "My poor distracted lad!"

"Give her a seat," said Sir Henry. "My poor woman, if you have any information to give about this terrible event——"

"Ay, I have information—plenty information. Nay, I want no seat. I'm standing as if I was at the judgment-seat of God; there's where I've stood this many a year, and been judged, but aye held fast. What is man, a worm, to strive with his Maker?—but me, I've done that, that am but a woman. I humbly crave the Almighty's pardon, and I've made up my mind to do justice now—at the last."

The people about looked at each other, questioning one another what it was, all but two, who knew what she meant. Young Lord Stanton, who was close to the table, looked across at a tall stranger behind, by whom the village constable was standing, and who replied to Geoff's look by a melancholy half smile. The others looked at each other, and 'Lizabeth, though she saw no one, saw this wave of meaning, and felt it natural too.

"Ay," she said, "you may wonder; and you'll wonder more before all's done. I am a woman that was the mother of three; bonny bairns—though I say it that ought not; ye might have ranged the country from Carlisle to London town, and not found their like. My Lily was the beauty of the whole water; up or down, there was not one that you would look at when my lass was by. What need I speak? You all know that as well as me."

The swell of pride in her as she spoke filled the whole company with a thrill of admiration and wonder, like some great actress disclosing the greatness of im-

passioned nature in the simplest words. She was old, but she was beautiful too. She looked round upon them with the air of a dethroned empress, from whom the recollection of her imperial state could never depart. Rachel could not have done it, nor perhaps any other of her profession. There was the sweetness of remembered triumph in the midst of the most tragic depths; a gleam of pride and pleasure out of the background of shame and pain.

"Ah! that's all gone and past," she went on with a sigh. "My eldest lad was more than handsome, he was a genius as well. He was taken away from me when he was but a little lad—and never came home again till—till the devil got hold of him, and made him think shame of his poor mother, and the poor place he was born in. I would never have blamed him. I would have had him hold his head with the highest, as he had a right—for had he not gotten that place for himself?—but when he came back to the water-side a great gentleman and scholar, and would never have let on where he belonged to, one that is not here to bear the blame," said 'Lizabeth, setting her teeth—"one that is gone to his account—and well I wot the Almighty has punished him for his ill deeds—betrayed my lad. Some of the gentry were good to him—as good as the angels in heaven—but some were as devils, that being their nature. And this is what I've got to say:" here she made a pause, raised herself to her full height, and threw off the red kerchief from her head in her agitation. "I've come here to accuse before God, and you, Sir Henry, my son, Abel Bampfylde, him I was most proud of and loved best, of the murder of young Lord Stanton, which took place

on the morning of the 2nd of August, eighteen hundred and forty-five—fifteen years ago and more.”

The sensation that followed is indescribable. Sir Henry Stanton himself rose from his seat, excited by wonder, horror, and pity, beyond all ordinary rule. The bystanders had but a vague sense of the extraordinary revelation she made, so much were they moved by the more extraordinary passion in her, and the position in which she stood. “My good woman, my poor woman!” he cried, “this last dreadful tragedy has gone to your brain—and no wonder. You don’t know what you say.”

She smiled—mournfully enough, but still it was a smile—and shook her head. “If you had said it as often to yourself as I have done—night and day—night and day; open me when I’m dead, and you’ll find it here,” she cried—all unaware that this same language of passion had been used before—and pressing her hand upon her breast. “The second of August, eighteen hundred and forty-five—if you had said it over as often as me!”

There was a whisper all about, and the lawyer of the district, who acted as Sir Henry’s clerk on important occasions, stooped towards him and said something. “The date is right. Yes, yes, I know the date is right,” Sir Henry said, half-angrily. Then added, “There must be insanity in the family. What more like the effort of a diseased imagination than to link the old crime of fifteen years ago with what has happened to-day?”

“Is it me that you call insane?” said ‘Lizabeth. “Eh, if it was but me! But well I know what I’m saying.” Then the wild looks of all around her suddenly

impressed the old woman, too much occupied hitherto to think what their looks meant. She turned round upon them with slowly awakening anxiety. "You're looking strange at me," she cried, "you're all looking strange at me! What is this you're saying that has happened to-day? Oh, my lad is mad!—he's roaming the hills, and Dick after him; he does na know that he's doing; he's out of his senses; it's no ill-meaning. Lads, some of you tell me, I'm going distracted. What has happened to-day?"

The change in her appearance was wonderful; her solemn stateliness and abstraction were gone. Here was something she did not know. The flush of anxiety came to her cheeks, her eyes contracted, her lips fell apart. "Tell me," she said, "for the love of God!"

No one moved. They looked at each other with pale, alarmed faces. How could they tell her? Geoff stepped forward and took her by the arm very gently. "Will you come with me?" he said. "Something has happened; something that will grieve you deeply. I—I promised Dick to tell you, but not here. Won't you come with me?"

She drew herself out of his grasp with some impatience. "There's been some new trouble," she said to herself—"some new trouble! No doubt more violence. Oh, God, forgive him; but he does not know what he's doing. It's you, my young lord?—you know it's true what I've been saying. But this new trouble, what is it?—more blood? Oh, tell me the worst; I can bear it all, say, even if he was dead."

"Lizabeth," said Geoff, with tears in his eyes—and again everybody looked on as at a tragedy—"you are

a brave woman; you have borne a great deal in your life. He is dead; but that is not all."

She did not note, nor perhaps hear, the last words. How should she? The first was enough. She stood still in the midst of them, all gazing at her, with her hands clasped before her. For a moment she said nothing. The last drop of blood seemed to ebb from her brown cheeks. Then she raised her face upward, with a smile upon it. "The Lord God be praised," she said; "He's taken my lad before me."

And when they brought to her the seat she had rejected, 'Lizabeth allowed herself to be placed upon it. The extreme tension of both body and mind seemed to have relaxed. The look of tragic endurance left her face. A softened aspect of suffering, a kind of faint smile, like a wan sunbeam, stole over it. The moisture came to her strained eyes. "Gone? Is he gone at last? On the hill-side was it?—in some wild corner, where none but God could be near, not his mother? And me that was dreading and dreading I would be taken first; for who would have patience like his mother? But after all, you know, neighbours, the father comes foremost; and had more to do with him—more to do with him—than even me."

"Take her away, Geoff," said Sir Henry. The men were all overcome with this scene, and with the knowledge of what remained to be told. Sir Henry was not easily moved, but there was something even in *his* throat which choked him. He could not bear it, though it was nothing to him. "Geoff, this is not a place to tell her all you have got to tell. Take her away—take her—to Lady Stanton."

"Nay, nay," she said; "it's my death-doom, but it's

not like other sorrow—I know well what grief is—when I heard for certain my Lily was dead and gone, and me never to see her more. But this is not the same; it's my death, but I cannot call it sorrow; not like the loss of a son. I'm glad too, if you understand that. Poor lad!—my Abel! Ay, ay; you'll not tell me but what God understands, and is more pitiful of His handiwork, say than the like of you or me."

"Come with me," said Geoff, taking her by the arm. "Come, and I will tell you everything, my poor 'Lizabeth. You know you have a friend in me."

"Ay, my young lord; but first let them write down what I've said, and let me put my name to it. All the more because he's dead and gone this day."

"Everything shall be done as you wish," said Geoff, anxiously; "but come with me—come with me—my poor woman; this is not a place for you."

"No," she said—she would not rise from her seat. She turned round to the table where Sir Henry and his clerk sat. "I must end my work now it's begun—I've another son, my kind gentlemen, and he will never forgive me if I do not end my work. Write it out and let me sign. I have but my Dick to think of now."

A thrill of horror ran through the little assembly: to tell her that he too was gone, who would dare to do it? John Musgrave, whom she had not seen, stood behind, and covered his face with his hands. Sir Henry, for all his steady nerves and unsympathetic mind, fell back in his chair with a low groan. Only young Geoff, his features all quivering, the tears in his eyes, stood by her side.

"Humour her," he said. "Let her have her way."

None of us at this moment surely could refuse her her way."

The lawyer nodded. He had a heart of flesh and not of stone; and 'Lizabeth sat and waited, with her hands clasped together, her head a little raised, her countenance beyond the power of painting. Grief and joy mingled in it, and relief and anguish. Her eyes were dilated and wet, but she shed no tears; their very orbits seemed enlarged, and there was a quivering smile upon her mouth—a smile such as makes spectators weep. "Here I and sorrow sit." There was never a king worthy the name but would have felt his state as nothing in this presence. But there was no struggle in her now. She had yielded, and all was peace about her. She would have waited for days had it been necessary. That what she had begun should be ended was the one thing above all.

A man came hurriedly in as all the people present waited round, breathless and reverential, for the completion of her testimony. Their business, whatever it was, was arrested by force of nature. The kind old Dogberry from the village, who had been standing by John Musgrave's side by way of guarding him, put up his hand to his forehead and made a rustic bow to his supposed prisoner. "I always knowed that was how it would turn out," he said, as he hobbled off, to which John Musgrave replied only by a faint smile, but stood still, as motionless as a picture, though all semblance of restraint had melted away. But while all waited thus reverentially a sudden messenger came rushing in, and addressing Sir Henry in a loud voice, announced that the coroner had sent him to make preparations for the inquest. "And he wants to know

what time it will be most convenient for the jury to inspect the two bodies; and if they are both in the same place; and if it's true."

There was a universal hush, at which the man stopped in amazement. Then his eye, guided by the looks of the others, fell upon the old woman in the chair. She had heard him, and she was roused. Her face turned towards him with a growing wonder. "She here! O Lord, forgive me!" he cried, and fell back.

"Two bodies!" she said. A shudder came over her. She got up slowly from her seat and looked round upon them all. "Two—another, another!—oh, my unhappy lad!" She wrung her hands, and looked round upon them, "Maybe another house made desolate; maybe another woman—Will you tell me who the other was?"

Here the labouring man, who had been with Wild Bampfylde on the hill-side, and who was standing by, suddenly succumbed to the strange horror and anguish of the moment. He burst out loudly into tears, crying like a child. "Oh, poor 'Lizabeth, poor 'Lizabeth!" he cried; he could not bear any more.

'Lizabeth looked at this man with the air of one awakening from a dream. Then she turned a look of inquiry upon those around her. No one would meet her eye. They shrank one behind another away from her, and more than one man burst forth into momentary weeping like the first, and some covered their faces in their hands. Even Geoff, sobbing like a child, turned away from her for a moment. She held out her hands to them with a pitiful cry, "Say it's not that—say it's not that!" she cried. The shrill scream of anguish ran through the house. It brought Lady Stanton

and all the women shuddering from every corner. They all knew what it was and how it was. The mother! What more needed to be said? They came in and surrounded her, the frivolous girls and the rough women from the kitchen, altogether, while the men stood about looking on. Not even Sir Henry could resist the passion of horror and sorrow which had taken possession of the place. He cried with a voice all hoarse and trembling, "Take her away!—take her away!"

CHAPTER XIX.

The Tragedy Ends.

'LIZABETH BAMPFYLDE went on to Stanton that same afternoon, where the remains of her two sons were lying. But she would not go in Lady Stanton's carriage.

"Nay, nay; carriages were never made for me. I will walk, my lady. It's best for me, body and soul."

She had recovered herself after the anguish of that discovery. Before the sympathisers round her had ceased to sob, 'Lizabeth had raised herself up in the midst of them like an old tower. The storm had raged round her, but had not crushed her. Her face and even her lips had lost all trace of colour, her eyes were hollow and widened out in their sockets, like caves to hold the slow welling out of salt tears. There was a convulsive trembling now in the pose of her fine head, and in her hands; but her strength was not touched.

"Oh, how can you walk?" Lady Stanton said; "you are not able for it."

"I am able for anything it's God's pleasure to send," she said; "though it's little even He can do to me now." The women stood round her with pitiful looks, some of them weeping unrestrainedly; but the tears that 'Lizabeth shed came one by one, slow gathering, rarely falling. She put on her red handkerchief over her cap again, with hands that were steady enough

till that twitch of nervous movement took them. "It should be black," she said, with a half-smile; "ay, I should be a' black from head to foot, from head to foot, if there was one left to mind." Then she turned upon them with again her little stately curtsey. "I'm not a woman of many words, and ye may judge what heart I have to speak; but I thank ye all," and, with once more a kind of smile, she set out upon her way.

John Musgrave had been standing by; he had spoken to no one, not even to Lady Stanton, who, trembling with a consciousness that he was there, had not been able, in the presence of this great anguish, to think of any other. He, and his story, and his return, altogether had been thrown entirely into the background by these other events. He came forward now, and followed 'Lizabeth out of the gate. "I am going with you," he said. The name "mother" was on his lips, but he dared not say it. She gave a slight glance at him, and recognised him. But if one had descended from heaven to accompany her, what would that have been to 'Lizabeth? It was as if they had parted yesterday.

"Ay," she said; then, after a pause, "it's you that has the best right."

The tragedy had closed very shortly after that penultimate chapter which ended with the death of Wild Bampfylde. When the carriage and its attendants arrived to remove him to Stanton he was lying on Geoff's shoulder, struggling for his last breath. It was too late then to disturb the agony. The men stood about reverentially till the last gasp was over, then carried the vagrant tenderly to the foot of the hill, with a respect which no one had ever shown him be-

fore. One of the party, a straggler, who had strayed further up the dell in the interval of waiting, saw traces above among the broken bushes, which made him call some of his comrades as soon as their first duty was done. And there on the little plateau, where Walter Stanton's body had been found fifteen years before, lay that of his murderer, the madman who had wrought so much misery. He was found lying across the stream as if he had stooped to drink, and had not been able to raise himself. The running water had washed all traces of murder from him. When they lifted him, with much precaution, not knowing whether his stillness might mean a temporary swoon, or a feint of madness to beguile them, his pale marble countenance seemed a reproach to the lookers-on. Even with the aspect of his victim fresh in their eyes, the men could not believe that this had ever been a furious maniac or man-slayer. One of them went to look for Geoff, and to arrest the progress of the other funeral procession. "There's another one, my lord," he said, "all torn and tattered in his clothes, but with the look of a king." And Geoff, notwithstanding his horror, could not but look with a certain awe upon the worn countenance. It might have been that of a man worn with great labours, with thought, with the high musings of philosophy, or schemes of statesmanship. He was carried down and laid by the side of his brother whom he had killed. All the cottagers, the men from the field, the passengers on the way, stood looking on, or followed the strange procession. Such a piece of news, as may be supposed, flew over the country like wildfire. There was no family better known than the Bampfylde, notwithstanding their humble rank. The

handsome Bampfylde: and here they had come to an end!

Old 'Lizabeth, as she made her way to Stanton, was followed everywhere by the same atmosphere of sympathy. The women came out to their doors to look after her, and even strong men sobbed as she passed. What would become of her, poor lonely woman? She gave a great cry when she saw the two pale faces lying peacefully together. They were both men in the full prime of life, in the gravity of middle age, fully developed, strongly knit, men all formed for life, and full of its matured vigour. They lay side by side as they had lain when they were children. That one of them had taken the life of the other, who could have imagined possible? The poacher and vagrant looked like some great general nobly dead in battle, the madman like a sage. Death had redeemed them from their misery, their poverty, the misfortunes which were greater than either. Their mother gave a great cry of anguish yet pride as she stood beside them. "My lads," she cried, "my two handsome lads, my bonny boys!" 'Lizabeth had come to that pass when words have no meaning to express the depths and the heights. What could a woman say who sees her sons stretched dead before her? She uttered one inarticulate wail of anguish, as a dumb creature might have done, and then her overwrought soul reeling, tottered almost on the verge of reason, and she cried out in pride and agony, "My handsome lads! my bonny boys!"

"Come home with me," said John Musgrave. "We have made a bad business of it, 'Lizabeth, you and I. This is all our sacrifice has come to. Nothing left but your wreck of life, and mine. But come home with

me. Where I am, there will always be a place for Lily's mother. And there is little Lily still, and she will comfort you——"

"Eh! comfort me!" She smiled at the word. "Nay, I must go to my own house. I thank you, John Musgrave, and I do not deserve it at your hand. This fifteen years it has been me that has murdered you, not my lad yonder, not my Abel. What did he know? And I humbly beg your pardon, and your little bairns' pardon, on my knees—but nay, nay, I must go home. My own house—there is no other place for me."

They came round her and took her hands, and pleaded with her too—Geoff, and his mother, with the tears streaming from her eyes. "Oh, my poor woman, my poor woman!" Lady Stanton cried, "stay here while *they* are here." But nothing moved 'Lizabeth. She made her little curtsy to them all, with that strange smile like a pale light wavering upon her face.

"Nay, nay," she said. "Nay, nay—I humbly thank my lady and my lord, and a' kind friends—but my own house, that is the only place for me."

"But you cannot go so far, if that were all. You must be worn out with walking only—if there was nothing more——"

"Me—worn out!—with walking!" It was a kind of laugh which came from her dry throat. "Ay, very near—very near it—that will come soon, if the Lord pleases. But good-day to you all, and my humble thanks, my lord and my lady—you're kind—kind to give them house-room; till Friday; but they'll give no trouble, no trouble!" she said, with again that something which sounded like a laugh. Laughing or crying,

it was all one to 'Lizabeth. The common modes of expression were garments too small for her soul.

"Stay only to-night—it will be dark long before you can be there. Stay to-night," they pleaded. She broke from them with a cry.

"I canna bide this, I canna bide it! I'm wanting the stillness of the fells, and the arms of them about me. Let me be—oh, let me be! There's a moon," she added, abruptly, "and dark or light, I'll never lose my way."

Thus they had to leave her to do as she pleased in the end. She would not eat anything, or even sit down, but went out with her hood over her head into the gathering shadows. They stood watching her till the sound of her steps died out on the way—firm, steady, unfaltering steps. Life and death, and mortal anguish, and wearing care, had done their worst upon old 'Lizabeth. She stood like a rock against them all.

She came down to the funeral on Friday, as she had herself appointed, and saw her sons laid in their grave, and again she was entreated to remain. But even little Liliass, whom her father brought forward to aid the pleadings of the others, could not move her. "Honey-sweet!" she said, with a tender light in her eyes; but she had more room for the children when her heart was full of living cares. It was empty now, and there was no room. A few weeks after, she was found dying peaceably in her bed, giving all kinds of directions to her children. "Abel will have your father's watch, he aye wanted it from a baby—and Lily gets all my things, as is befitting. They will set her up for her wedding. And Dick, my little Dick, that has aye been the little one—who says I was not thinking of

Dick? He's been my prop and my right hand when a' deserted me. The poor little house and the little bit of land, and a' his mother has—who should they be for, but Dick?" Thus she died tranquilly, seeing them all round her; and all that was cruel and bitter in the lot of the Bampfylde came to an end.

CHAPTER XX.

Conclusion.

JOHN MUSGRAVE settled down without any commotion into his natural place in his father's house. The old Squire himself mended from the day when Nello, very timid, but yet brave to repress the signs of his reluctance, was brought into his room. He played with the child as if he had been a child himself, and so grew better day by day, and got out of bed again, and save for a little dragging of one leg as he limped along, brought no external sign of his "stroke" out of his sick-room. But he wrote no more Monographs, studied no more. His life had come back to him as the Syrian lord in the Bible got back his health after his leprosy—"like the flesh of a little child." The Squire recovered after a while the power of taking his part in a conversation, and looked more venerable than ever with his faded colour and subdued forces. But his real life was all with little Nello, who by and by got quite used to his grandfather, and lorded it over him as children so often do. When the next summer came, they went out together, the Squire generally in a wheeled chair, Nello walking, or riding by his side on the pony his grandpapa had given him. There was no doubt now as to who was heir. When Randolph came to Penninghame, after spending a day and a half in vain researches for Nello, life having become

too exciting at that moment at the Castle to leave any one free to send word of the children's safety—he found all doubt and notion of danger over for John—and he himself established in his natural place. Whether the Squire had forgotten everything in his illness, or whether he had understood the story which Mary took care to repeat two or three times very distinctly by his bedside, no one knew. But he never objected to John's presence, made no question about him—accepted him as if he had been always there. Absolutely as if there had been no breach in the household existence at all, the eldest son took his place; and that Nello was the heir was a thing beyond doubt in any reasonable mind. This actual settlement of all difficulties had already come about when Randolph came. His father took no notice of him, and John, who thought it was his brother's fault that his little son had been so unkindly treated, found it difficult to afford Randolph any welcome. He did not, however, want any welcome in such circumstances. He stayed for a single night, feeling himself coldly looked upon by all. Mr. Pen, who spent half his time at the Castle, more than any one turned a cold shoulder upon his brother clergyman.

“You felt it necessary that the child should go to school quite as much as I did,” Randolph said, on the solitary occasion when the matter was discussed.

“Yes, but not to any school,” the Vicar said. “I would rather——” he paused for a sufficiently strong image, but it was hard to find; “I would rather—have got up at six o'clock every day, and sacrificed everything—rather than have exposed Nello to the life he had there;—and you who are a father yourself.”

"Yes; but my boy has neither a girl's name nor a girl's want of courage. He is not a baby that would flinch at the first rough word. I did not know the nature of the thing," said Randolph, with a sneer. "I have no acquaintance with any but straightforward and manly ways."

The Vicar followed him out in righteous wrath. He produced from his pocket a hideous piece of pink paper.

"Do you know who sent this?" he asked.

Randolph looked at it, taken aback, and tried to bluster forth an expression of wonder—

"I—how should I know?"

"What did you mean by it?" cried the gentle Vicar, in high excitement;—"did you think I did not know my duty? did you think I was a cold-blooded reptile like—like the man that sent that? Do you think it was in me to betray my brother? I know nothing bad enough for him who made such a suggestion. And he nearly gained his point. The devil knows what tools to work with. He works with the weakness of good people as well as with the strength of bad," cried mild Mr. Pen, inspired for once in his life with righteous indignation. "Judas did it himself at least, bad as he was. He did not whisper treason in a man's ears nor in a woman's heart."

"I don't know what you mean," said Randolph, with guilt in his face.

"Not all, no; fortunately you don't know, nor any one else, the trouble you might have made. But no less, though it never came to pass, was it that traitor's fault."

"When you take to speaking riddles I give it up," said Randolph, shrugging his shoulders.

But Mr. Pen was so hot in moral force that he was glad to get away. He slept one night under his father's roof, no one giving him much attention, and then went away, never to return again; but went back to his believing wife, too good a fate, who smoothed him down and healed all his wounds. "My husband is like most people who struggle to do their duty," she said. "His brother was very ungrateful, though Randolph had done so much for him. And the little boy, who had been dreadfully spoiled, ran away from the school when he had cost my husband so much trouble. And even his sister Mary showed him no kindness; that is the way when a man is so disinterested as Randolph, doing all he can for his own family, for their *real* good."

And this, at the end, came to be what Randolph himself thought.

Mrs. Pen, after coming home hysterical from Elfdale, made a clean breast to her husband, and showed him the telegram, and confessed all her apprehensions for him. What could a man do but forgive the folly or even wickedness done for his sweet sake? And Mrs. Pen went through a few dreadful hours, when in the morning John Musgrave came back from his night journey and the warrant was put in force. If they should hang him what would become of her? She always believed afterwards that it was her William's intervention which had saved John, and she never believed in John's innocence, let her husband say what he would. For Mrs. Pen said wisely, that wherever there is smoke there must be fire, and it was no use

telling her that Lord Stanton had not been killed; for it was in the last edition of the *Fellside History*, and therefore must be true.

When all was over Sir Henry and Lady Stanton made a formal visit of congratulation at Penninghame. Sir Henry told John that it had been a painful necessity to issue the warrant, but that a man must do his duty, whatever it is; and as, under Providence, this was the means of making everything clear he could not regret that he had done it now. Lady Stanton said nothing, or next to nothing. She talked a little to Mary, making stray little remarks about the children, and drawing Nello to her side. Liliias she was afraid of, with those great eyes. Was that child to be Geoff's wife? she thought. Ah! how much better, had he been the kind young husband who should have delivered her own Annie or Fanny. This little girl would want nothing of the kind; her father would watch over her, he would let no one meddle with her, not like a poor woman with a hard husband and step-daughters. She trembled a little when she put her hand into John's. She looked at him with moisture in her eyes.

"I have always believed in you, always hoped to see you here again," she said.

"Come, Mary, the carriage is waiting," said Sir Henry. He said after that this was all that was called for, and here the intercourse between the two houses dropped. Mary could not help "taking an interest" in John Musgrave still, but what did it matter? everybody took an interest in him now.

As for Geoff, he became, as he had a way of doing, the sun of the house at Penninghame; even the old

Squire took notice of his kind, cheerful young face. He neglected Elfdale and his young cousins, and even Cousin Mary, whom he loved. But it was not to be supposed that John Musgrave would allow a series of love passages to go on indefinitely for years between his young neighbour and his daughter Liliás, as yet not quite thirteen years old. The young man was sent away after a most affecting parting, not to return for three years. Naturally, Lady Stanton rebelled much, she who had kept her son at home during all his life; but what could she do? Instead of struggling vainly she took the wiser part, and though it was a trial to tear herself from Stanton and all the servants, who were so kind, and the household which went upon wheels, upon velvet, and gave her no trouble, she made up her mind to it, and took her maid and Benson and Mr. Tritton and went "abroad" too. What is it to go abroad when a lady is middle-aged and has a grown-up son and such an establishment?—but she did it: "for I shall not have him very long!" she said, with a sigh.

Liliás was sixteen when Geoff came home. Can any one doubt that the child had grown up with her mind full of the young hero who had acted so great a part in her young life? When the old Squire died and Nello went to school, a very different school from Mr. Swan's, the idea of "Mr. Geoff" became more and more her companion. It was not love, perhaps, in the ordinary meaning of the word; Liliás did not know what that meant. Half an elder brother, half an enchanted prince, more than half a hero of romance, he wove himself with every story and every poem that was written, to Liliás. He it was, and no Prince

Ferdinand, whom Miranda thought so fair. It was he who slew all the dragons and giants, and delivered whole dungeons full of prisoners. Her girlhood was somewhat lonely, chiefly because of this soft mist of semi-betrothal which was about her. Not only was she already a woman, though a child, but a woman separated from others, a bride doubly virginal because he was absent to whom all her thoughts were due. "What if he should forget her?" Mary Musgrave would say, alarmed. She thought it neither safe nor right for the child, who was the beauty and flower of Penninghame, as she herself had been, though in so different a way. Mary now had settled down as the lady of Penninghame, as her brother was its lawful lord. John was not the kind of man to make a second marriage, even if, as his sister sometimes fancied, his first had but little satisfied his heart. But of this he said nothing, thankful to be able at the end to redeem some portion of the life thus swallowed up by one of those terrible, but happily rare, mistakes, which are no less wretched than they are half divine. He had all he wanted in his sister's faithful companionship and in his children. There is no more attractive household than that in which, after the storms of life, a brother and sister set up peacefully together the old household gods, never dispersed, which were those of their youth. Mary was a little more careful, perhaps, of her niece, a little more afraid of the troubles in her way, than if she had been her daughter. She watched Liliass with great anxiety, and read between the lines of Geoff's letters with vague scrutiny, looking always for indications of some change.

Liliass was sixteen in the end of October, the third

after the previous events recorded here. She had grown to her full height, and her beauty had a dreamy, poetical touch from the circumstances, which greatly changed the natural expression appropriate to the liquid dark eyes and noble features she had from her mother and her mother's mother. Her eyes were less brilliant than they would have been had they not looked so far away, but they were more sweet. Her brightness altogether was tempered and softened, and kept within that modesty of childhood to which her youthful age really belonged, though nature and life had developed her more than her years. Though she was grown up she kept many of her childish ways, and still sat, as Mary had always done, at the door of the old hall, now wonderfully decorated and restored, but yet the old hall still. The two ladies shared it between them for all their hours of leisure, but Mary had given up her seat at the door to the younger inhabitant, partly because she loved to see Lillas there with the sun upon her, partly because she herself began to feel the cool airs of the north less halcyon than of old. The books that Lillas carried with her were no longer fairy tales, but [maturer enchantments of poetry. And there she sat absorbed in verse and lost to all meaner delights, on the eve of her birthday, a soft air ruffling the little curls on her forehead, the sun shining upon her uncovered head. Lillas loved the sun. She was not afraid of it nor her complexion, and the sun of October is not dangerous. She had a hand up to shade the book, which was too dazzling in the light, but nothing to keep the golden light from her. She sat warm and glorified in the long, slanting, dazzling rays.

Mary had heard a horse's hoofs, and, being a little restless, came forward softly from her seat behind to see who it was; but Liliias, lost in the poetry and the sunshine, heard nothing.

"She wept with pity and delight,
She blushed with love and virgin shame,
And like the murmur of a dream
I heard her breathe my name.

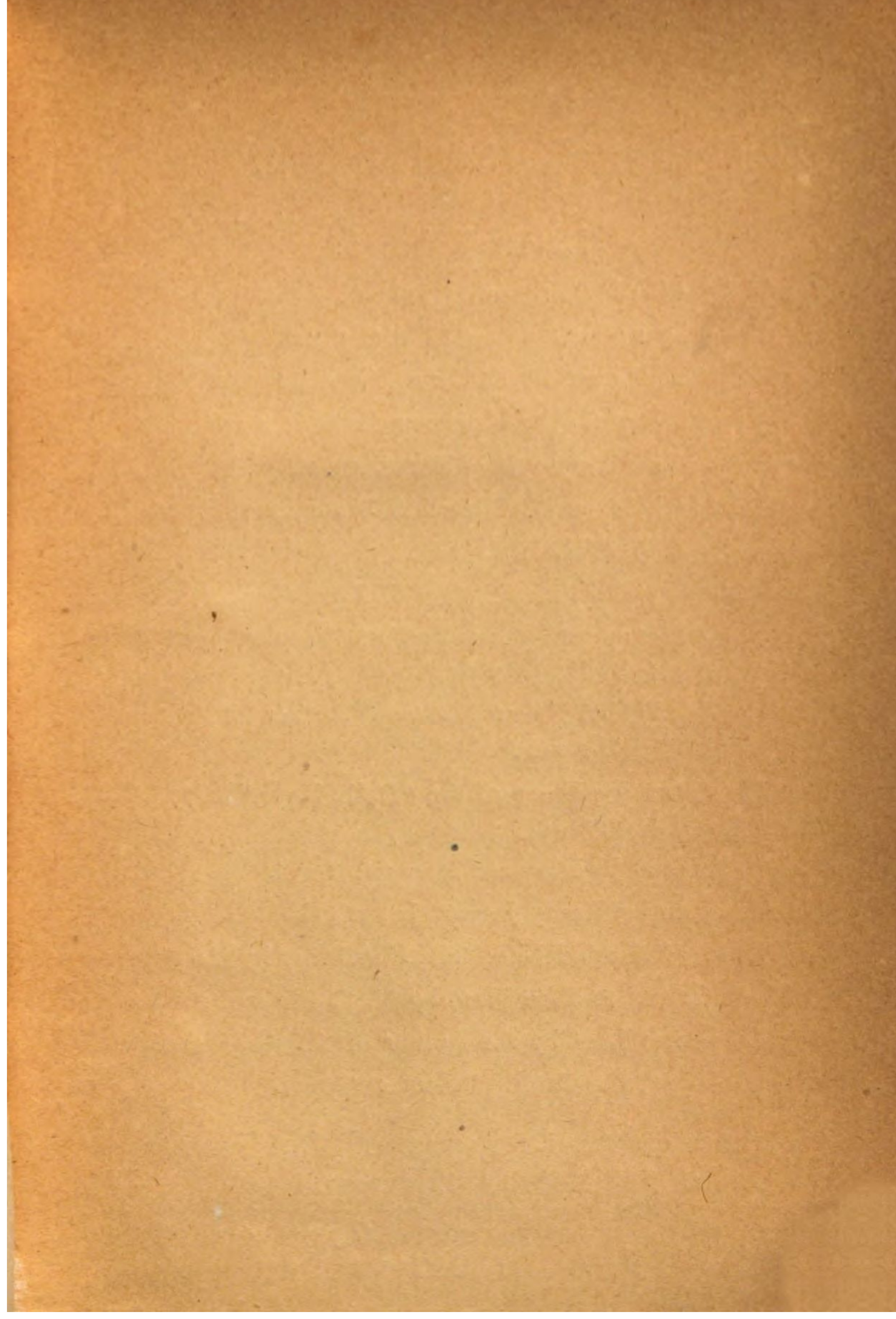
"Her bosom heaved, she stepp'd aside
As conscious of my look she stept,
Then suddenly, with timorous eye,
She fled to me and wept."

Mary saw what Liliias did not see, the horseman at the foot of the slope. He looked and smiled, and signed to her over the lovely head in the sunshine. He was brown, and ruddy with health and travel, his eyes shining, his breath coming quick. Three years! as long as a lifetime—but it was over. Suddenly, "Lily—my little Lily," he cried, unable to keep silence more.

She sprang to her feet like a startled deer; the book fell from her hands; her eyes gave a great gleam and flash, and softened in the golden light of sunset and tenderness. The poetry or the life, which was the most sweet? "Yes, Mr. Geoff," she said.

THE END.

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